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ABSTRACT

This practical guide for new teachers is written by teachers and offers strategies for the early years of teaching that cover classroom practice and professional development. Seven chapters address teaching practice and cover the following topics: getting to know students at the beginning of the year; strategic planning for the whole year; following the curriculum; classroom management; types and sources of resources; working in partnership with parents; and successfully managing the homestretch--March to June. Short essays on professional development and personal concerns alternate with these chapters. These are: "Curing Occupational Hazards: From the Inside Out" (Timothy Gangwer); "Curing Occupational Hazards: From the Outside In" (Paula Hartman); "On Becoming a Professional" (David Georgi); "Professionalism: You Get What You Pay For" (Betty Myers); and "A Dialogue on Professionalism" (Vincent Bono and Eileen G. Krieg). The guide includes a list of contributing teachers, a list of IMPACT--II information centers around the nation, and an index. (JB)

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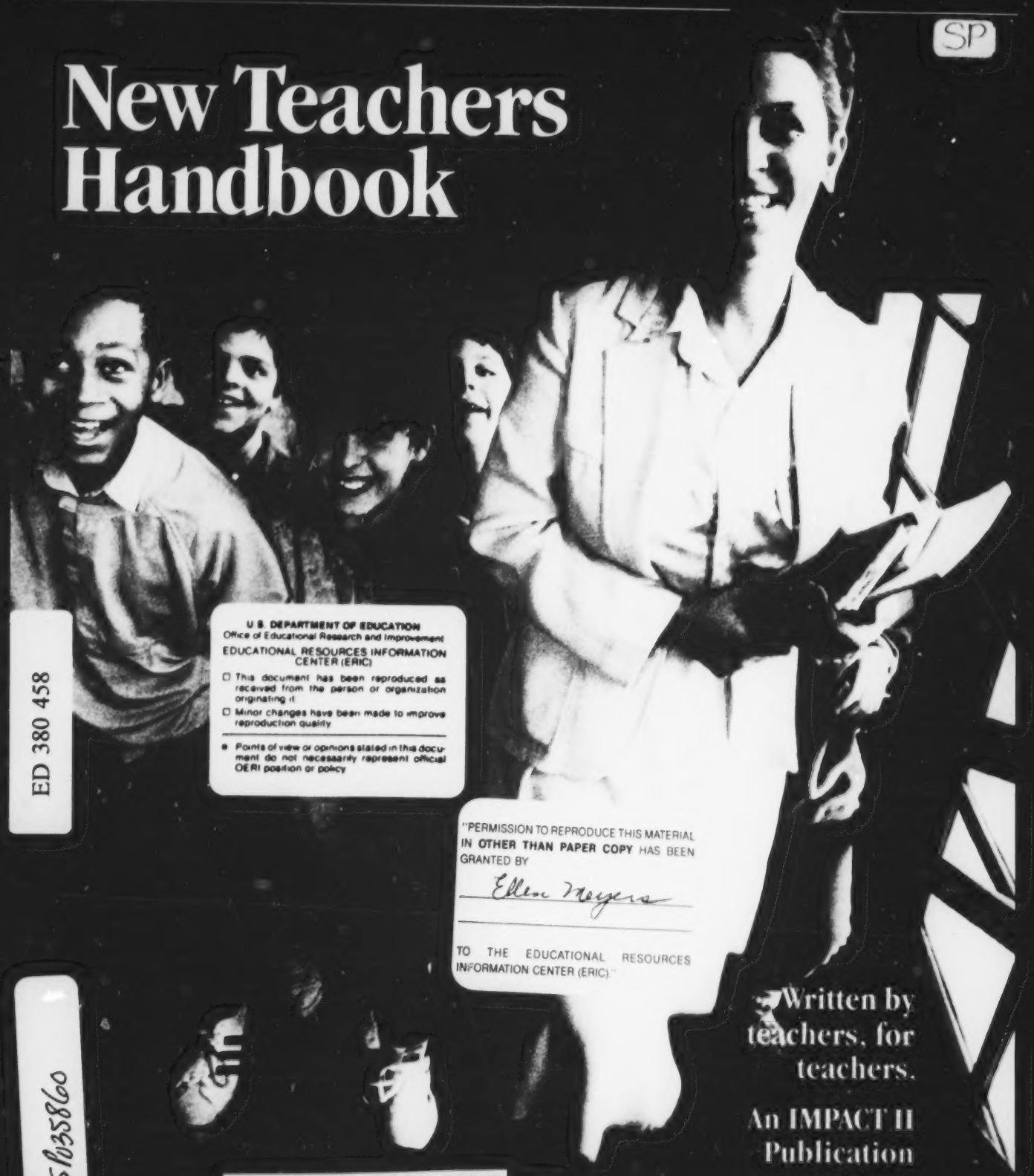
New Teachers Handbook



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Written by teachers, for teachers.

An IMPACT II Publication

New Teachers Handbook

SECOND EDITION

Written for teachers by teachers:

Audrey A. Adams
Pearl Ann Allen
Judith A. Ballantyne
Vincent Bono
Sharon Briggs
Rosemary Cabe
Patricia Ann Crowley
Timothy Gangwer
David Georgi
Jean Gibran
Paula Hartman
S. T. Hawk
Woodie J. Ischer
Merleen D. Ivey
Judith Decherd Jones
Rochelle Kaplan
Joyce M. Kent
Eileen G. Krieg
Kerri Lyons
Lois Montgomery
Betty Myers
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Rose Reissman
Michael Rutter
Robert Sarnoff
Barbara L. Schmidt
Lucille Sheets
Marilyn Siegel
Carol Simiele
Christy M. Thomas
Yvonne Turung
Debby Darby Vandevender
Nina Wasserman
Judy Whatley
Deborah Witherell
Tony Zaharias
Judith P. Zinsser

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John Poreba
John B. Poster
Susan Shafer
Albert Shanker
Robert R. Spillane
Dorothy Succoff

Directed by Ellen Dempsey
Edited by Ellen Meyers
Compiled by Margot Jones
Associate Editor: Marie Bobetsky
Production Assistant: Rafael Ortiz

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Preface to Second Edition

Since publication of the first edition of the ***New Teachers Handbook*** in 1988, events in the education world have confirmed many of the predictions made in the Introduction to that edition. Teachers are indeed at the center of the shared decision-making process and integrally involved in the growing movement toward site-based management. They are taking their rightful place as leaders in the setting of classroom and school goals, and in implementing and evaluating the achievement of these goals for their individual students. They are assuming and discharging the responsibilities that must necessarily accompany the rights of empowerment. IMPACT II's development and expansion reflect this exciting shift to purposeful professionalism.

Many of the then-new teachers who were the original target audience for our first handbook are now three- or four-year veterans in the classroom, themselves mentors for the present-new staff members entering the school system and joining our collaborative ranks. We urge you all to add another dimension to your role-modeling activities by becoming active participants in the IMPACT II network of teachers and teacher programs. Help us to maintain and expand the scope of collegial interaction that brings beginning and experienced educators together in a common effort to recognize and meet educational needs. Contribute to the magic of "taking an idea and going creative."

Introduction

In the schools of the not-too-distant future, teachers will be at the center of decision making. Teachers will have more independence in the design of the curriculum; and it will be the teachers who will create the plans for dealing with the individual differences of students. The 1980s will be noted in the history of our public schools as the decade of teacher empowerment. By the 1990s, teachers will be taking the lead not only in their classrooms but in their schools.

This handbook is dedicated to you—the new teacher. It was written by IMPACT II teachers from across the country, with respect and admiration. These teachers have been the trailblazers in the educational reform movement, and they are eager to work with you—as you enter a profession that, until recently, was considered by many to be a job. Great strides are being made as the quality of our public schools becomes equated with the future of this country. And it is to the teachers that our nation now looks. Congratulations—you are in the right place at the right time.

It is our hope that this handbook helps guide you in all that you will try to achieve in your early years of teaching. Please let us know if it is of value to you in your work. IMPACT II stands for "by teachers, for teachers." You may be asked to contribute to future publications.

What is IMPACT II?

IMPACT II was established in 1979 to recognize and reward creative teachers, and to improve classroom instruction through teacher networking. Small grants are awarded to teachers who have developed successful programs and to teachers who wish to "take an idea and go creative." By joining IMPACT II networks, teachers disseminate good program ideas through workshops, interschool visits, and annual catalogs; form collegial relationships; and are encouraged to enhance their professionalism.

IMPACT II, which began as a pilot program in New York City and Houston, Texas, is now operating in such diverse places as Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Santa Barbara County, California; Washington, D.C.; the State of Connecticut; Westchester County and Rockland County, New York; Fairfax County, Virginia; Boston, Massachusetts; and Chapel Hill, North Carolina. (For full site listing, please turn to page 50.) On the local level, IMPACT II is funded by school districts and local foundations and corporations.

1 Getting to Know Your Students

The process of getting to know your students is a yearlong endeavor. During this time teachers develop and modify their expectations for student achievement, decide what they need to know about their students, recognize students' special interests, talents, deficiencies and problems, assess and evaluate ability levels, identify sources of specialized assistance for student needs, and in the process become a special person to each student.

For many teachers, the process of getting to know their students actually starts during the summer months prior to the beginning of the school year. One teacher advises: *"During these months I spend time thinking about my expectations for the coming school year. This can be a frustrating task for a beginning teacher but a necessary step in the process of getting to know your students well.*

"Some time during the month of August, I work on a plan for the month of September. This plan consists of a monthly focus, weekly goals (for both my students and me), student behaviors to be discussed, curriculum topics, and parent involvement. I keep the plan SIMPLE, CLEAR, and CONCISE.

"The planning cycle repeats itself with each new month throughout the school year. I try to plan about two weeks in advance of the new month. It is important to know, in advance, what the expectations will be for me and my students because the projection of my expectations to the children is critical. They must have a ***clear*** *and* ***concise*** *understanding of those expectations. While I am getting to know my students, they are getting to know me!"*

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Hi! My name is _____. The computer at school will know me as #_____. I was born in the city of _____, which is located in the great state of _____. Right now I am _____ years old and looking forward to my next birthday on _____. If I do a little subtraction, I can let you know that I was born in 19____. I live with my _____ (put in names), at the following address: _____. Our zip code is _____. During my free time I like to _____. I usually watch TV about _____ hour(s) a day. My favorite show is _____. When I'm outside I usually like to _____. In school my best subject is _____. If I had to choose a difficult subject, it probably would be _____ _____. The thing that makes me happiest is _____. Sometimes I really get afraid when _____. My favorite book or magazine is _____. Music makes my day. Right now, my favorite singer is _____ and my favorite song is _____. Usually you will find me listening to the radio on my favorite station, _____. In the future I plan to finish the _____ grade and then begin to _____. Of all the people that I know about, I think _____ will always be my hero because _____.

Please add anything special about yourself that you think I need to know.

Teaching expectations

New teachers should first examine their own goals for teaching and then mesh these goals with the school's goals.

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Regardless of the locality of the school, the size of the school or its population, achievement for excellence and the shaping of self-directed, productive learners appear to be realistic teaching expectations. Throughout the teaching experience, teachers will need to focus on what is best for the learner.

"Each year my teaching expectations rise, but I have a much clearer idea of what is possible and what is not. Teachers have a specific body of knowledge (a core curriculum) to impart to students. They expect pupils to master the most important concepts."

Teachers also instruct students in organization, study skills and creative thinking and expect that students will, at year's end, be better organized and have more effective reading, writing and thinking skills. Furthermore, teachers help students master social skills such as sharing and courtesy that help them to grow individually and work well in groups. Teachers must let the students know they have a responsibility to attend class regularly, to complete required work, and to act appropriately in the classroom. A good teacher will foster curiosity about the world and tap creativity and transform the room into a discovery center. Teachers who give clear guidelines to the students while showing compassion, consistency, humor and excitement about teaching will motivate the pupils.

What do I need to know about my students?

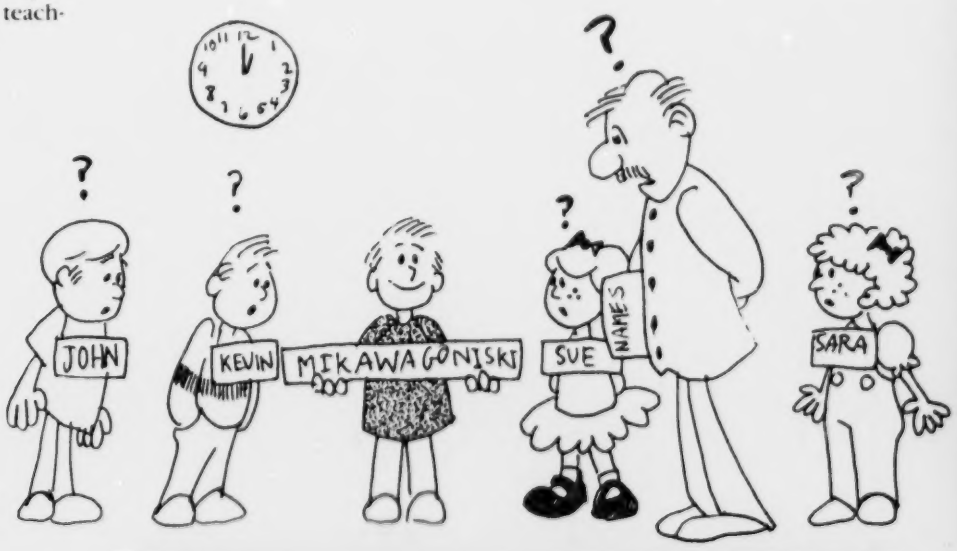
You need to know any factors that will effect a more positive, productive teaching/learning experience. Begin by gathering available information about your students. Prior to the "first day," try to obtain a list of the students entering your class, their addresses, phone numbers, birth dates, and the name of the parent or responsible adult. This class list is a valuable source of information for a variety of reasons: birthdays, illnesses, parent conferences and reports, to mention a few. Keep this class list in your plan book for easy access.

Learn student names quickly, and make sure they learn yours. Name tags, name cards (on the desks), roll books, seating charts, and get-acquainted games may help initially. You might pair students and ask them to interview each other and then report back to the class, or set up a semicircle and ask the students to introduce themselves.

"I like to give information about my own background—jobs I have held, my family, my interests. Since I travel widely and am a photographer, I bring in souvenirs and photographs. I always take pictures of my students. I display one print (with the student's permission) and let the student keep one print.

"As an introduction of all the class members to each other, I begin with a self-portrait project. The children talk about which characteristics make one special. Each child looks into the mirror on the wall of my teacher's closet and depicts himself or herself, with special attention to details such as hair-dos, ornaments, and clothing. After the portraits are completed, they are discussed in a class meeting before the end of the first week of school. They are then mounted and remain on exhibit all year as part of the student's school environment, a creative symbol of those special people occupying this space. This first class project establishes the vital precedent that the children can express themselves and wait for a turn to speak and listen to each other. Pride in this type of bulletin board display sets the tone for pride in the classroom all year."

Know your students' health status because a health problem could impede progress within the educational environment. Check students' health records, ask for information during parent conferences, and consult with the school medical personnel.



Ivan Roman

"The secret of education lies in respecting the pupil."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Knowledge of your students also increases when you become more knowledgeable about their community. Home visits, attendance at community affairs and daily reading of the local papers are just a few ways to increase one's knowledge of the community.

Recognizing students' special interests, talents, deficiencies and problems

There are situations where the traditional approach to teaching can prevail; however, there are numerous situations where the teacher must play the role of Columbus, the discoverer, and identify what "turns a student on or off to learning." What about your students' varied learning styles/modalities? Are there students who learn more efficiently through the auditory, visual or tactile/kinesthetic channels? Identifying the learning style will aid in planning the student's instructional program. There are numerous professional references on learning styles. Professional book clubs, teacher bookstores and resource centers, school and local libraries can be useful in providing information. All teachers have to realize and eventually practice the belief that "all students have potential." The teacher must serve as an educational detective in discovering that potential.

It is a joyous teaching/learning experience when the reluctant learner suddenly takes an interest in reading or math because it will help him or her to enter a contest or complete a project. How about the learner who has significant behavior problems but is failing to bring the negative behavior under control? Making the student aware that, upon completion of an academic task, he or she may spend a designated amount of time pursuing a recreational interest may serve to reduce and/or eliminate the inappropriate behavior.

Teacher observations, student/staff/parent interviews, interest surveys, questionnaires, formal/informal assessments, and student records are just some of the tools that may be used to discover students' special interests, talents, deficiencies and problems.

Assessing and evaluating ability levels

One of the most effective ways for getting to know students' ability levels is to employ the use of formal and informal assessment instruments. Information obtained from the various assessment instruments can be used to identify cognitive, affective and/or psychomotor deficits. Obtained data provides a clearer picture of students' needs and abilities and may be used for making educational program decisions.

Useful sources of assessment information include: **publishers of assessment materials** (get on their mailing lists), **building resource personnel** (especially the librarian, the resource teacher and the counselor), **students' cumulative folders, test-training manuals** (information on the administering and scoring of assessment instruments), and **current assessment staff development activities** (posted on the staff development board). Conduct ample practice sessions prior to engaging in assessment activities.

Where to go to get specialized help for students with problems

So you are getting to know your students, and in knowing them you have discovered some problems that exceed the assistance rendered at the classroom level. Is there available help? An emphatic **YES!**

Begin your search with available school resources. Most schools at the onset of the year provide orientation, printouts and/or a handbook on available services. Use the handbook; become familiar with its contents. Read references that will assist you in defining the student's problem in an accurate, professional manner. Conference with the student's peers, other teachers, the school administration, the support staff (counselor, psychologist, therapists). Target in on your professional references/resources that you used in college. Become conversant with growth and development patterns. Try to determine whether the problem is a manifestation of a more serious problem or indicative of student maturation levels. Identify community agencies

that can be of assistance. Prior to utilizing out-of-school contacts, however, be sure to obtain authorization from the school administrator, and telephone or contact in person a parent or legal guardian to obtain permission and support.

What makes each teacher special to his or her students?

Ask this question of ten different students, and more than likely you will elicit ten responses multiplied by ten.

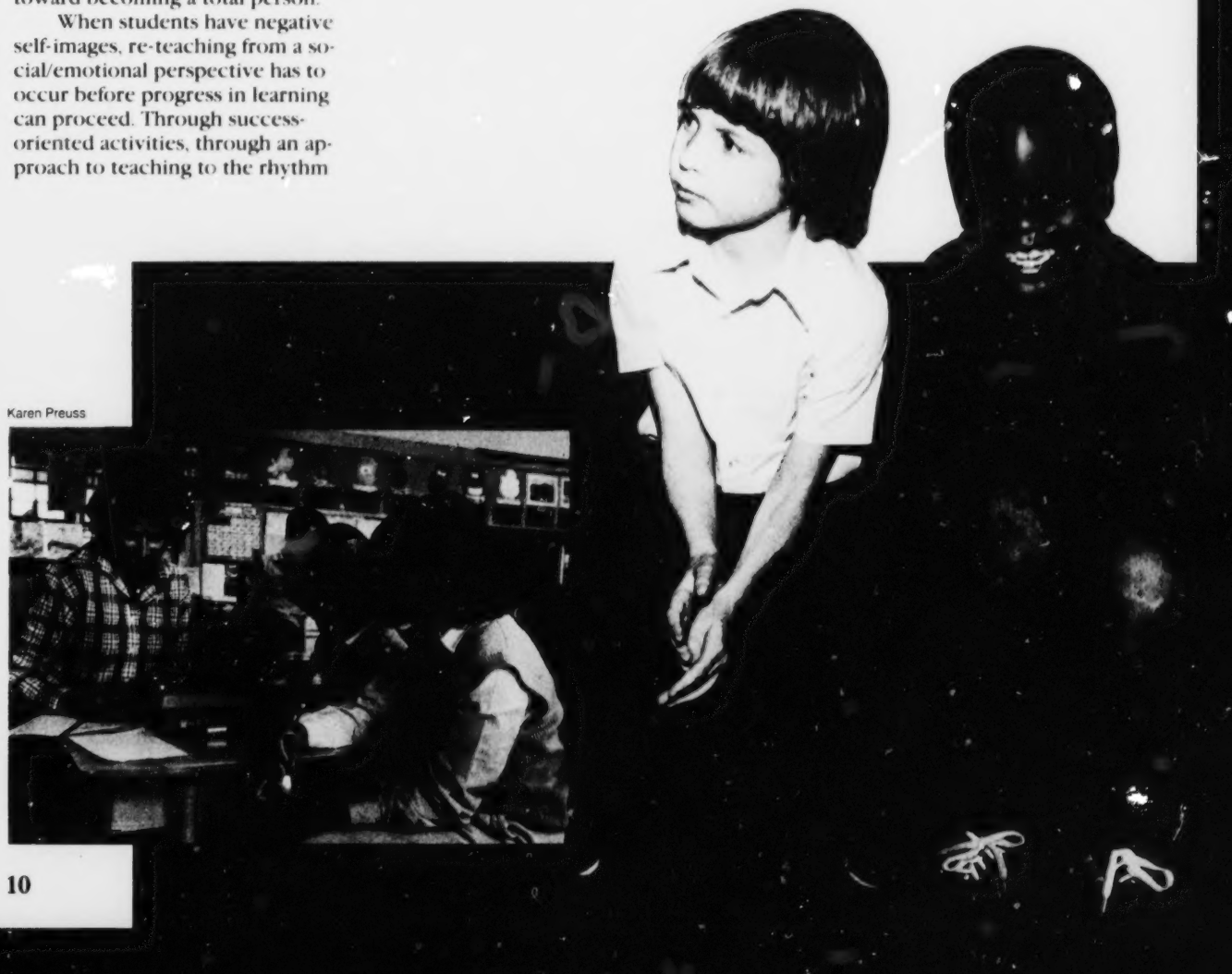
A positive teacher-student relationship tends to be strengthened when a teacher demonstrates listening with care. Often, students come from environmental settings where for one reason or another their need for someone to listen is unmet. The school may become the only safe haven where students may be heard, where students may work toward becoming a total person.

When students have negative self-images, re-teaching from a social/emotional perspective has to occur before progress in learning can proceed. Through success-oriented activities, through an approach to teaching to the rhythm of "achieving is believing," the teacher can be a catalyst enabling students to become successful "life-long learners."

As you become better acquainted with your students, you will catalog those activities, events and experiences that spell SUCCESS. The more positive the learning environment, the more positive the learning results.

Students tend to have high regard for teachers who are competent, knowledgeable about their subject matter and aware of creative ways in which to present it. Join at least one professional organization, attend seminars and workshops, make periodic visits to those community sites and/or persons that will aid in expanding your educational, cultural and personal horizons. Thoroughly studying your lessons, organizing and preparing needed materials and determining outcomes are helpful approaches in instructing with competence.

"The most worthwhile revelation of my teaching career came when I realized that in order to be really successful at my job of teaching science to seventh graders, I had to learn to take lemons and make lemonade. I now take the typical characteristics of the seventh grader and use them as assets. Understanding your students will help make your teaching exciting and challenging for everyone."



Karen Preuss

Curing Occupational Hazards: From the Inside Out

by Timothy Gangwer

Job stress: mental tension directly relating to one's occupation. **Frustration**: feelings of discouragement which can lead to avoidance. **Slump**: routine boredom causing a sharp decline in success. **Lack of fulfillment**: dissatisfaction. **Isolation**: feelings of being set apart or separate. **Burnout**: feelings of ineffectiveness or inadequacy. These are the common occupational hazards in the complex field of teaching. Are they curable? If so, how do you cure them?

I believe it was my first year of teaching when I first discovered what a teacher actually is. While teaching in a predominantly minority school, I came upon an argument among some elementary-school students involving racial tension. While approaching the students, I overheard some racially biased terms, in particular . . . "Honky." I asked a student if, since I am white, that made me a "honky" as well. He then replied, "Aw, Mr. Gangwer, you're not white . . . you're a teacher!" From that moment on, I understood my role in the teaching field. Being androgynous, not belonging to any ethnic group, and not having to ever eat or sleep is the greatest thing in the world! No stress, fatigue, hunger or frustration.

Students tend to create an image of teachers at a very early age. They are shocked to see teachers in the grocery store wearing tennis shoes and sunglasses. But behind that pair of sunglasses is a person with feelings, and a state of mind that can be altered by occupational hazards. These are things the students do not observe; however, students are constantly affected by them.

Any occupational hazard affects performance. Performance in the teaching field regulates student achievement. From this critical standpoint, one must always be aware of the causes of such occupational hazards for two important reasons: (1) state of mind, and (2) student achievement.

What are some of the causes of job stress, burnout, lack of fulfillment, frustration, isolation, or slumps? Most teachers would agree to such things as workload, class size, salary, lack of parental support, societal perceptions of

teachers and the overall educational system in general. A successful teacher can always turn a negative into a positive. A potential student failure can be a motivational success: "You may have received only a 40% this week on your spelling test, John, but this is some of the best handwriting I have seen in all my years of teaching!" This strategy is nothing more than a tool to alter that student's state of mind. John will walk away from a potentially negative situation smiling, knowing that he has impressed his teacher, and will be eager to try even harder next week. Given this analogy, here are several ways I personally deal with some of the occupational hazards that can alter a teacher's state of mind.

Workload: The paper work is endless. Most of the paper work is directly related to my students; therefore I regard it as a way to give each student individual thought and attention. (E.g., Not, "Oh great . . . another paper to grade," but, "Hey, I did not realize Bill was reversing his 'b' and 'd'.") Using this frame of mind tends to give me a feeling of accomplishment. Bill's paper has aided me in the modification of my instructional strategies for the next lesson. To me, that is time well spent, as opposed to laborious, ongoing routines that consume time. Tomorrow there will be a new stack of papers to grade. I wonder what new strategy will result from those.

Class size: Too many students and not enough of me! On the other hand, if I had half as many students there might be a chance that I would not have Cindy in my class. If Cindy were not in my class, we might not have had that stimulating discussion she initiated last week during social studies. That means we might never have enjoyed the marvelous field trip extending from our discussion.

Lack of parental support: Today many families are in a situation where both parents must work. As a result, it becomes easy for a parent to be content with Johnny's day-to-day school experience . . . until something goes wrong. Then, all of a sudden, there is an instant concern for Johnny's well-being. I tend to believe that the concern is always there, but may not always need emphasizing. I am both a teacher and a working parent. As a result, I feel I have a good understanding of parental support. Keeping parents informed of the many successes of their children gives them a feeling of ease and contentment, so that if a problem should arise they can be prepared to work ***with*** me, instead of against me. When I call Mrs. Smith about John, she does not approach the phone with a "What now?" attitude. "Hello Mrs. Smith. I just wanted to let you know about John's beautiful handwriting. He took his spelling test today, and although he only scored a 40%, I am comfortable with his progress because I know how hard you and his father work with him at home. I am eager to see next week's test. Thanks for your continual support, Mrs. Smith!"

Societal perceptions: I am "only one person." I do not feel the compulsion to constantly worry about the overall views of society. I feel that everything I do in my classroom could ultimately change that view; however, I am "only one person." Well there are many "only one persons" out there, and together we make a very large group. If the average attitude of the group is negative, then that will determine the societal perception of the group. However, a positive attitude has proved to be contagious. Positive attitude, success and optimism coming out of the schools inevitably find their way into the streets and into the homes. Children are also part of our society. Remember my experience of a child's perception of a teacher?

Overall, I feel the key to a successful teaching career is one's state of mind. If you tend to have a burdensome amount of paper work . . . that is one negative factor. If this bothers you . . . that is another negative factor. Now you are up to two negative factors, which alters your disposition—and you go home and snap at your spouse, another negative factor. Why not cure the disease before it spreads? For every negative factor, create a positive factor. For every positive factor, create another. In other words, build a brick wall around your positive state of mind, and never allow the occupational hazards to chip away at it and cause it to crumble.

2 Strategic Planning—
Facing the First Day and Feeling Good on the Last

No matter how great the summer has been, going back to school in the fall is always exciting. Whether you anticipate the first day of school with pleasure—and feel good on the last day—could depend on your planning. You will undoubtedly meet some teachers who insist that they "wing it" and do just fine, but they probably are experienced teachers who have been teaching the same subject for years. For a new teacher, making plans can be a less painful and more satisfying way to face the year.

Each new school year requires an organized plan of action. This plan emerges slowly at first, and it will need to be both structured and flexible. As a new teacher you will be in the process of developing your own plan and strategy. Strategy is an essential element needed to bring a full-scale plan to fruition. Your curriculum, the makeup of your class, the advice and assistance of fellow-workers, and your own personality become critical elements in your strategy. It is learning how to blend and balance all of these factors that will give your classroom its structure and its flexibility.

Planning . . . both long-term and short-term . . . is essential. You must set goals for yourself and your students, but then be willing to adjust these goals to meet the needs and abilities of your students.

Making lesson plans less painful: Long-term and short-range lesson planning

The first thing you should keep in mind is that lesson plans are just that—plans. They reflect what you intend to cover on any particular day, week, month. They should not be set in concrete; no one will hold you to them completely. If, as you are teaching a concept, you realize that the students do not understand it, do not rush through just so you can stay on schedule. Be flexible. Use your plans as guidelines, and revise them as you go along. You may have to make up ground later on by spending less time on something that is not quite as important, but do not leave your students struggling with a concept when you go on to the next one. After all, even when experienced teachers make up a lesson plan, unless they have actually taught the lesson before to a uniquely similar class, they

DAILY PLAN Grade Level 4-5

Teacher _____ Room _____

8:30 Attendance, Cafeteria, Routine matters, Planning, Announcements

9:00 **READING:**

Book:			Book:		
Objective(s):	1.		Objective(s):	1.	
	2.			2.	
	3.			3.	
Assignment:	pp.		Assignment:	pp.	
Skills:			Skills:		
Assignment:	pp.		Assignment:	pp.	

LIBRARY PERIOD:

Skills:			Skills:		
Assignment:	pp.		Assignment:	pp.	

9:40

SPELLING UNIT			**DICTIONARY WORK**		
Objective:			Objective:		
Assignment:			Assignment:		
Correct:	pp.		Correct:	pp.	

10:10

LANGUAGE ARTS			**SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY**	
Objective:			Objective:	
Assignment:	pp.		Assignment:	
			Group Leader:	
			Group Recorder:	
			Members:	

10:40 **SUPERVISED RECESS:** Play in assigned area/Bathroom visit/Drinking fountain/Snacks

11:00 **MATHEMATICS**

Group:			Group:		
Objective:			Objective:		
Assignment:	pp.		Assignment:	pp.	
Skills:			Skills:		
Assignment:	pp.		Assignment:	pp.	

11:40 **HEALTH**

Objective:			Materials:	
Assignment:	pp.			

12:00 **NOON INTERMISSION:** Take children to the cafeteria/Play in assigned area

1:00 **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

Team: _____ Team: _____

Captain: _____ Captain: _____

Warm-Up Drills: 1. Body Bender 5. Deep Breather
2. Windmill 6. Wing Stretcher
3. Jumping Jack 7. Bobber
4. Tortoise/Hare 8. Swimming in the Air

Skills to be practiced: 1. _____
2. _____

Game: _____

1:30 **SCIENCE/SOCIAL SCIENCE/CURRENT EVENTS**

Area of Study: _____ Area of Study: _____

Objective(s): 1. _____ Objective(s): 1. _____
2. _____ 2. _____
3. _____ 3. _____
4. _____ 4. _____

Activities: _____ Activities: _____

Assignment: _____ Assignment: _____

2:00 **ART/MUSIC**

Area of Study: _____ Area of Study: _____

Objective(s): _____ Objective(s): _____

Materials Materials
Needed: 1. _____ Needed: 1. _____
2. _____ 2. _____
3. _____ 3. _____
4. _____ 4. _____

Assignment: _____ Assignment: _____

Record #: _____ Record#: _____

2:30 **DISMISSAL**

Meetings: _____ Notice Due: _____

Homework
Assignments: _____

Conferences: _____

are merely estimating the amount of time they will spend on it. Even the best teachers have to scuttle their plans once in a while and go back and review, before they can resume where they left off.

To make lesson planning less painful, good organization is a must! Start way ahead before school begins by reviewing the curriculum for your district. Look for opportunities to integrate subjects. **For example**: A fall science unit on the forest, with a fungi-mushrooms theme, can teach social studies map skills, vocabulary in reading, writing skills via logs or journals, and art by drawing types of forest fungi.

Probably the best approach to lesson plans is to start by reviewing the list of subject area objectives or the curriculum goals outlined for you by your school district for your grade level, and to plan a general outline for the year. If, within your overall teaching program, you are following a textbook from beginning to end in math, history, or science, you might want to plot the approximate number of pages you want to cover each quarter, keeping in mind that the first chapters of a book are often review chapters which can be covered quickly, while the end chapters may require slower going. This will require that you really acquaint yourself with the book you will be using. If you are teaching history, you should probably plot out which historical periods you want to finish each quarter. If you are teaching skills, keep in mind those skills the students need to master first so that they can build upon them for more complex skills.

Once you have a general idea of what your year will look like, you can focus on what you want to accomplish during the first quarter—which will encompass about nine weeks. Keep in mind that you need a cushion of a few periods each quarter for the unexpected—days when you will not teach, fire alarms, early dismissals because of snow.

Using a semester or yearlong planning grid with large blocks to write in (a calendar works well), schedule your units, testing days (both your tests and district-required tests), holidays, and any other interruptions that might deduct from instructional time. Consider the timing of major projects and tests. You will not feel the stress of grading so much if all your classes are not taking tests or turning in essays on the same day. Stagger the dates, and consider your home life and other personal obligations as you schedule.

Lesson plans start out as a challenge, but as you work with the available materials you will see that they follow a logical plan. Today, most textbooks are thorough about offering a breakdown of specific material or lessons. At first, use this as your primary guide; and as time passes, you will gradually incorporate your own flexibility into your program. It is this blend of what is prepared for you, with your own additions or deletions, that will bring a sense of balance to your teaching.

Once you have more manageable goals to concentrate on for the quarter, you can plot out your plans for the first few weeks. Your lesson plans should cover no less than two weeks' work—try never to plan on a daily basis. There are two reasons for this: **first**, planning biweekly gives you an overall picture of where you are heading, and you can communicate this to your students. It is amazing how quickly students sense that a teacher does not have any idea what he or she is doing, so you need to have direction. **Second**, it is easier and less nerve-wracking to do your planning once every two weeks. You can always revise as you go along.

An excellent idea is to write your plans in general terms on a weekly calendar, ditto it, and hand it out to the students. You can include homework assignments, if you like; what books they should bring to class, announcements about future due dates, and even such information as sports events and school contests. Most students really appreciate being able to see what they are going to be doing, and parents particularly appreciate it. It is helpful for students with learning disabilities to see your plans in writing, because often they are not good listeners. If you do not want to pass out weekly calendars until you feel more confident about your planning skills, it is a good idea to write your daily plans on the board before the students arrive, including the homework assignments.

When you plan, try to vary the types of activities your students will be doing each period. Try not to lecture for the whole period, for example. The way to keep your

Heidi Robinson

Some teachers use *readers theater* as an activity that gives variety to their lesson plans. Students enjoy dramatizing stories they have read as a class.

classroom fresh and exciting is to be creative. Try to have a minimum of two, but probably no more than three, different activities in a period. Possible activities can include reading silently, reading aloud, watching a film, videotaping a project, writing, brainstorming, listening to you lecture or read, listening to other students give reports or speeches, performing skits, working in groups, taking notes, doing worksheets, competing on the board or with teams—you get the picture. Frequently it works best if you team a quiet activity with one that allows the students more active input.

Long-term and short-range planning also make self-evaluation easier. Did you meet your objectives? What will you do differently next time? Writing your lesson plans in one color ink and quick evaluations in another provides reminders for "next time." (Color coding, by the way, is a tremendous timesaver for everything from the grade book to files—try it!) At the end of the year a constructive critique is appropriate for all teachers. You will have your principal's evaluation, of course, but for your own benefit go beyond that.

Ask students to evaluate the course, your methods of teaching, and the activities—plus how well they felt they performed. Make the evaluations anonymous in order to ensure more candid responses. An interesting final assignment for a class is to write a letter to the teacher's next-year students, telling them what to expect.

Use all of this feedback and your own feelings to write a self-critique. Again, writing is better than merely pondering because you crystallize your thoughts. In addition, it provides a record to refresh your memory next fall, or in years to come. Who knows, your critiques may be the basis for your first bestselling book!

Balancing your workload

Balancing your workload is a definite challenge. Some days will fly by, some will be crammed with interruptions or the unexpected, and others will leave you with an unfilled hour. It is best to plan for more than you will probably accomplish. If you do not need that "something extra" that day, it will always be on the back burner as a possibility for another day.

Some activities take enormous planning on your part, while others take very little. Some lessons require hours of grading, while others can be graded by students or parent volunteers. Keep this in mind when you are planning your lessons.

It is essential that you periodically assess your approach to lesson planning. Are you making full use of the planning time made available to you? Are you meeting the needs of your students? Are you covering required information in reasonable spans of time? Are you satisfied that things are running smoothly?

In conclusion

Teaching is intellectually stimulating, and with strategic planning you can have an enjoyable year. Spontaneity is a constant feature of the school day, so being flexible is essential. However, planning organizes your time so that your workload is balanced. You really can face the first day with excitement and wind up the last day with satisfaction!

"When I critique the school year, I compare what I had hoped to achieve with what was achieved. Those previously written long- and short-term objectives prove useful here. If I have time (and often I don't—time is the real enemy), I try to give post-tests similar to the diagnostic tests I used in the beginning of the year. What new techniques proved effective? Ineffective? What materials were most useful? What additional supplies would I want for the following year? Which staff members were most helpful during the year? Could we develop joint projects for the future?"

Identify the students who made the most and the least progress. Why? How might you better reach those difficult students? Define the units you would exclude or expand. What further enrichment activities might you plan? Evaluate your parent involvement. How might you further include them? Do you need to rearrange the room? Your schedule? Pick out ideas you would like to share with fellow educators. Recognize your biggest problem. Think of ways of handling it differently in the future.

Do you feel good about the year? Do you want to return in September? If your answer is yes to the last two questions, your year was a success.

Here are a few simple suggestions that may help to make your first year, and all of those that follow, easier.

- **Keep a journal.** Each day, indicate the ratio of "success" to "failure" and include any hints to keep in mind for the future. Refer to this the summer before your second year. Highlight anything that you deem useful. It will always come in handy!
- **Do your best to stay organized!** Keep materials in order and specific subject materials together. Keep all records in one drawer of your desk.
- **Be open to suggestions.** Many suggestions offered by colleagues have taken years to streamline. Even if you cannot handle them yet, put the suggestions in your journal to think about for later use.
- **Hang in there!** Teachers are extraordinary people. You have entered a profession unlike any other. You will be an indelible influence on many children. You will need stamina, strength and a smile on your face.
- **Remember that as a teacher you are also a learner.** You will learn much more than you could ever imagine about people and things. You will learn to balance structure and flexibility. You will learn what it means to be part of a dedicated group of professionals.
- **You will make it, and often wonder how you did it! Remember that every September will be easier than the one before it!**

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3 Following the Curriculum—
A Comfort or a Constraint?

What are the purposes of a curriculum and a curriculum guide?

Usually many people have thought about the many things that go into a curriculum—a plan of work for students and teachers in a given discipline for a given grade level—and into the guide that goes along with it. In social studies, for instance, master teachers, scholars and professional administrators try to write curricula and guides embodying all that they believe is wise and best about the discipline. They choose the content they consider necessary for an educated citizen; they describe skills essential to a literate, productive future life; they present attitudes and values they believe should be encouraged or discouraged in teaching their subject.

Everyone who writes a curriculum or a curriculum guide wants it to be "teacher proof." The authors want it to be effective, no matter what. They want to enlighten and educate students regardless of the teacher's experience, the teacher's views, the teacher's abilities. Ideally, they want it to work even in the hands of a teacher who does not agree with their content choices, their methods or their goals. Don't be offended or insulted; you will feel the same way when you come to design your own lessons and your own curriculum.

Curriculum guides can be excellent springboards for ideas. Most simply itemize what must be taught. The "how" is up to the teacher, and that is where creativity gets a workout. Activities are usually suggested, to be used as they appeal to the teacher. You can enjoy the challenge of adjusting the material to your particular students. Learning styles are as numerous as teaching styles, so employ a variety of learning activities. Keep the students alert and interested, and provide each child with opportunities to acquire information in his or her primary style. For a new teacher, perhaps a little insecure in the awesome role of molding young people's minds, a guide from more experienced educators will be welcomed.

What to do first: Taking comfort and accepting constraints

Try to read the curriculum and the guide all the way through, even though you will be tempted to look at it unit by unit, one step ahead of the kids. If you do make it all the way through you will have a sense of a week, a whole month, a semester and the year. This is invaluable when you first begin to teach. It gives you the complete picture, tells you where you are going and "how the story comes out." This

Beryl Goldberg ©1987

Classroom environment plays a crucial role in establishing an understanding of the students' academic, social, and psychological needs. You will want to create an attractive room and to provide a place where children will love to come every day.

makes it possible for you to set priorities and to make choices once you are in your own classroom.

This, in fact, is the principal "comfort" and value to a new teacher of a curriculum and its accompanying guide. The first year is hard for everyone, no matter what the training. There is so much to think through, to prepare, to comprehend —even before you go into the classroom and meet the students, and come out with a set of personalities to understand and a pile of assignments to correct. The curriculum, the guide, the lesson plans and assignments mean you do not have to reinvent the wheel. You do not have to know everything, and you can draw on the work and experience of others. Most important, if you are ever desperate you have something to do for tomorrow.

Curriculum guides usually describe content, skills and values objectives and goals. While you are reading through the pages of requirements, suggestions and lessons, decide what comes easily to you and what comes hard. Which topics are strengths of yours? Which skills seem especially important to you? Which attitudes do you want to emerge from the learning situations that you will create?

"The following procedure has helped me, especially when I have been assigned a new course or when new textbooks or curriculum guides have been adopted or simply when I am evaluating and revamping the courses I taught the previous year.

1. ***If it is a new course, curriculum guide and/or text:***
   - Review the curriculum guide and outline the essential elements to be covered. Eliminate all the verbiage in order to create an easy guideline to follow in the pre-planning stage and during the year.
   - Read the author's notes and sample methodology in the text. This will give you a feel for the way the text is set up. You may find new ideas that you have wanted to try but were not sure how to implement.
   - Peruse the text with care, and look for the following:
     - What is in the curriculum guide but not presented in the text?
     - What is introduced in the text but not included in the curriculum guide?
     - Would you like to use this material for enrichment or a separate unit, or eliminate it?
   - Take notes. Include the subject, page number and chapter.
     - What is not clearly presented?
     - What areas do not have adequate examples, questions or exercises?
   - Plan the basic units in outline form, using the curriculum guide, text and enrichment ideas, and estimate the length of time each unit will take. For each unit include:
     - Principles to be taught.
     - Possible strategies, methods and ideas you might want to use. (Be creative.)
   - Decide where you feel you will need short-range evaluation tests, and quizzes.
   - List appropriate audiovisual aids, and note the catalog numbers.
   - Based on the original perusal of the text and curriculum guide, ponder and ponder some more. Then list transparencies you may need, and worksheets to be prepared for individuals, and for small and large groups.
2. ***Re-evaluating a course taught the previous year:***
   - Look over the past daily plans, paying primary attention to notes made in the margin— such as went well, was confusing, worked best with small groups, need a new worksheet. Jot these down on a separate sheet of paper.
   - Look over last year's quizzes and tests. Look at penciled notes concerning class performance and the questions that were missed by too many students. This quickly denotes:

"The teacher role is not to impose his values or ideas but to select and order the experiences the child encounters and to help him to respond reflectively to those experiences."

John Dewey

     - Areas of confusion that need to be presented differently, or perhaps in more detail.
     - Poorly written questions.
   - Ponder and ponder some more about what you may change, add or delete in the unit plan, and DO IT.

"Prior to the first day of school, I write four weeks' worth of probably my most detailed daily lesson plans of the year. I may have planned too much, but never too little. This gives me the freedom to spend the time learning about my students, and how and at what rate they learn."

Now you are ready for the last step. Talk to other teachers who have used the curriculum and the guide. Draw on their experiences, especially the ways in which they dealt with any constraining aspects. Most curricula have too much content. This can be a problem if an outside evaluation like a state exam comes at the end of the year. As for skills, you can expect about one-third of your students to achieve the specified level in all categories, particularly the ones involving conceptual and analytical thinking. This happens even with preselected students and the world's most brilliant teacher. Some kinds of learning depend on physiological change, on maturation, and not on the educational system or the educators. The last aspect of the curriculum—the values and attitudes—tends to surface when you least expect it. For this kind of learning, other teachers may have experience with different approaches that are best suited to your students.

In all likelihood the worst constraints of the curriculum will not be theoretical, they will be circumstantial. With a large, heterogeneous class of 35 students, you may find it hard to believe that there is a rational reason for them to be together. The books you must use do not arrive. The chalkboard was smeared with grease three years ago, and you can write on only one corner of it. The ditto machine ruined your master. When you have the film and the projector ready and the class assembled in a room that you can darken, the outlet does not work. A loudspeaker interrupts the lesson at irregular intervals. The administrators in your school are well-meaning, but so lost in processes and procedures that they have no way of solving your specific problem today, this minute, before you have to go back to your students and the mess. This is when other teachers can be a wonderful comfort and aid. They have dealt with much of this before. They still teach, they still care, and they can help you find a way through the seeming labyrinth of obstacles to effective pedagogy.

Kelly Ann Baerga

Using creativity and innovation

Some districts are lenient in their requirements for following the curriculum guide. The order of the units can be changed, and sections omitted or added. Find out your school's policy about this matter and if no restrictions apply, let this be your invitation to be innovative and creative. If you feel limited by having to follow a curriculum someone else wrote, here is your chance to express yourself.

The major consideration as you seek to express your individualism is accountability, which occurs in two significant areas. Will you be able to affirm to your department chair, principal, parents and students that you have covered all the material in the district- and state-required curricula? The other area of accountability lies in testing the students. Many factors such as family environment or health obviously influence students' learning ability; but eventually the public and the administrators will examine test scores to ascertain how well your students are responding. "Teaching to the test" sounds ugly, but the concept's suitability actually depends on whether the test deals with the district's objectives. If it does, focusing on teaching material for the test is appropriate as a goal. If the content of the test is irrelevant to the curriculum and the realities of the student's situation, its reason for being needs to be questioned.

You may teach in a school district that has a curriculum guide no one can find, or one covered with dust, and so you must design your own content plan. At first you might wonder what you could possibly have to say to students, day after day, for a whole school year. In this case, talking to experienced teachers and/or the department chairs about what should be included is the first step. Also, study the textbook. Your school may merely advocate following that. Next, investigate supplementary resource materials and activities—original sources, guest speakers, out-of-school visits, community involvement. Then, consider your student teaching days: what was successful for you there? Finally, whatever the content you decide on, include study skills in your lesson plans.

The primary use of curricula should be to help you teach students how to learn. Taking the time to teach the process of learning will ultimately allow students to become independent learners. Students empowered to learn independently will cover more material, achieve higher, and grow in self-esteem.

What to do in the classroom

You have the curriculum; you have the guide. You have decided on your strengths and your interests. You have set your priorities in terms of content, skills and values. Now you have to transmit it all to your students. Be practical. Go for what works. This may mean setting a minimum for all and pushing the maximum for a few. Be flexible.

"When the lesson does not work, try not to take it personally. I did my first year and ended up crying and leaving the room; I actually believed that a bunch of tenth graders wanted to hurt my

feelings when [illegible]used to be excited about [illegible]s of the Civil War in t[illegible] States."

With all o[illegible]pecified goals, decide what you should do with the students in class, and what they can do on their own. In social studies, for example, they need to acquire information—to learn how to think about it, and how to use it. They need to acquire the ability to share their information and their ideas clearly and convincingly with others. Decide what balance you want to set, and what the circumstances will allow.

"In my classes I tend to emphasize the skills of the curriculum over the content. I believe that given the means to read and research, students can find the information. Class time can best be used then for practicing the thinking and the sharing."

Don't worry about being brilliant and original every day, with every lesson, for every class. Your creativity will shine through when you come to the topics that you know and love. Preserve your energy for the most intangible—and perhaps most important—of all the teaching goals—the attitudes. Here the emphasis shifts from you and didactic strategies to the students, and to the environment you jointly create and sustain. Your classroom is not so much a place in which you can teach as it is ***a place in which they can learn.*** Telling kids that they think in stereotypes does little. Better to set up situations that demonstrate everyone's propensity to prejudice. Speaking of democratic processes in the relatively authoritarian atmosphere of a school can be counterproductive. Better to allow the class to make some decisions, however minor, and to practice and require courtesy of everyone, even of yourself.

Last words of encouragement

A curriculum and a curriculum guide, like everything else a teacher has, are only means to an end. They are among the tools given to you to help you do what you want to do—excite and educate young people. Accept them respectfully your first year; learn to use them as you learned to borrow from the writings of those who taught you. Learn to draw from them as you learned to count on your classmates' notes when you were in school. Experiment when you can; keep track of what you discover that is new and effective. Set up the files for your own curriculum. There will come a time when you too will want to write one.

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Curing Occupational Hazards: From the Outside In

by Paula Hartman

The first year of teaching is the most difficult. Even when you were an outstanding student teacher, the ultimate responsibility was that of the classroom teacher. Now the responsibility for all those living beings in your classroom rests with you. For one year, you are responsible not only for the academic progress of all the students in your room but also for their social and emotional growth. You will have an impact on the lives of these students that will last a lifetime. They will change from knowing you. You will inspire them to become the best adults they can be by expecting and insisting that they become the best students they can be in your room. You are here because you care. If you stay in teaching, it will be because you continue to care and you have learned ways of keeping yourself mentally and emotionally healthy.

No matter how rewarding you find watching students learn, and how many wonderful ideas and how much enthusiasm you have, eventually you will also begin discovering some of the occupational hazards of teaching. I am referring to such things as stress, burnout, isolation, frustration, boredom, and lack of fulfillment.

Many of these problems can be overcome by finding an experienced teacher with whom you can develop a relationship of trust and who will allow you to confide your successes and failures and permit you to ask for advice. Being a classroom teacher can isolate you from other adults. There is no one there to say "That lesson really went well" or "You really goofed on that one." You need someone who will give you a pat on the back for a job well done, or encouragement to go back in and try it again—along with suggestions on other approaches to try. Beginning teachers are not alone in this need for interaction. Skilled teachers also find someone with whom to experience the incidents of the day.

Rob Schoenbaum

"Eventually you will find one or two teachers with whom you can communicate comfortably and on whom you can rely for confidentiality."

So how do you find this person? Before school starts, go around to each teacher's room and introduce yourself. Give a compliment or express interest in something in which the teacher is involved. Stay only 5 to 10 minutes since they are busy and you are busy. During the year when you need assistance or advice, it will be much easier to turn to a teacher if you have taken time to establish the beginning of a relationship. Eventually you will find one or two teachers with whom you can communicate comfortably and on whom you can rely for confidentiality.

Your principal is a good choice to ask for suggestions

when you feel outside help is required. Do not hesitate to seek out assistance when you need it. You are trained as a classroom teacher, not as a specialist. Your job is to be aware enough to see a problem and refer it to the specialist, much in the same way a family doctor will refer a patient to a surgeon. Teachers become frustrated when they take on the problems of a student in serious difficulty, instead of seeking the involvement of other professionals and becoming part of a team effort. Working with a counselor or special education teacher will allow you to provide the student with more help.

You can also offer your students additional help through the use of volunteers. Once you have established your classroom rules and routine, you can invite parents and other people from the community to volunteer in your room—for special projects or on a regular basis. You must be careful not to impart any information that could be considered confidential, but it is appropriate to bring up the successes of the students and the amusing happenings that invariably occur. Volunteers can also reduce some of your workload by taking over activities that involve a great deal of your time but little of your professional expertise—such as cutting out letters for bulletin boards, preparing art materials, refereeing a game, or listening to individual students read. It is important to remember that while these volunteers are reducing your isolation and stress from overwork, they will need positive feedback from you and your students so that they will feel their time is well spent.

During the year there will be periods of time when the routine that you have set up will begin to bore you and your students. That is when it is time to rearrange the furniture, begin a special project, or set aside an afternoon for fun. Special projects are great at pulling everyone out of a slump, although they usually mean more work for you. Special projects can range from your class writing a play and performing it for the parents to building all your lessons around a theme such as pioneer days—culminating in a student demonstration of pioneer crafts or perhaps preparing a pioneer feast. These special projects are much easier to coordinate if you have volunteers assisting in your room.

Sometimes you will need a reminder of what a great job you are doing. Throughout the year, keep a photo album. Include pictures of your students involved in interesting activities that you planned. Include photographs of finished projects, such as the bulletin board in the hall, the art display, scenes from the class play, the guest speakers, and volunteers. Also place in your album letters of thanks from parents and notes from the principal commending your performance. Add copies of students' work that have special meaning for you. The album will help you to remember why you are teaching and how great it can be. The album is also useful to take along if you are interviewing for a new position.

Some teachers have started keeping journals to help them remember the good times, as well as to allow them to write down those things they wished they had said when better judgment prevailed. Sometimes journals are also useful in clarifying actual problems. Problems may shrink in size when they are expressed in writing.

The first year is the most difficult, but you have a lot of people cheering for you. Everyone wants you to succeed, but they do not expect you to do it single-handedly. The principal and experienced teachers need the enthusiasm, energy, and new ideas you bring to the school. You need the teaching techniques and wisdom that the experienced teachers offer. The specialists rely on you for referrals of children who have needs that cannot be met by a classroom teacher. And the parents and your students need you most of all. You are the one who can help your students grow into educated and responsible adults. You are the one who can change lives and inspire people to be the best that they can be because you are a teacher.

Classroom Management

A well-managed classroom provides an environment conducive to learning. Students learn best when they know what is expected of them, and when organizational and instructional skills are used that are appropriate to their learning needs and styles. Successful management is also dependent upon your ability as a teacher to recognize, interpret and respond to events that occur daily within your classroom. Recent studies indicate that effective teachers organize their time, space, materials, auxiliary personnel and students to create positive environments for learning.

"I start off the school year by setting the stage for a natural, human relationship with all students. Initial activities involve the children in creating this kind of environment. First, all students complete an interest inventory to determine special interests, likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses. This becomes the first entry in student folders that I keep on file for use throughout the year. As we begin to learn about each other as individuals, I ask the students to think of all the ways our classroom could be made into the best possible place for learning. All ideas are noted and discussed to determine which should be adapted to our classroom setting. I find that this activity leads naturally into our determining a set of conduct guidelines that all students must use to reach our goal for the kind of classroom we want to establish and maintain."

"I'm the boss! And you're nothing!"
"Big deal! You're the boss over nothing!"
"One of these days Alice! One of these days!"

Ralph and Alice Kramden, *The Honeymooners*

Planning

Planning is an important part of your classroom management system. It may include the development of lesson plans for a unit of study, or it may involve the location and preparation of resources and equipment necessary for a particular activity. Effective planning requires you to draw upon both practical and theoretical knowledge and to use organization, visualization and prediction skills. The results of your planning will be demonstrated in effective, organized teaching, and in maximum use of curriculum resources and instructional materials.

Exactly how much school time you will be allotted for planning will vary according to the grade level you teach and school-district policy. Long-range planning for the goals and objectives of the year's curriculum should be done at the beginning of the school year. You may be asked to accomplish this individually, with other teachers of your grade level or subject, or with the entire faculty. You will probably also prepare short-term daily lesson plans on a weekly or monthly basis. Remember that flexibility is an important aspect of planning; unexpected changes in the class program often occur, and will cause you to modify, change, postpone or eliminate a planned activity or lesson.

Coping with classroom size and composition

Although classroom composition is largely determined by the social, economic and educational structure of the community, and the number of students per class by the school district in which a teacher is employed, there are a few basic management skills that can be applied under most conditions. Class size may range from 25 to 35 students, and teachers need to be well-prepared to educate these large numbers, often without auxiliary personnel. We also need to coordinate and implement our educational programs to serve students from diverse ability levels, as well as varied racial and ethnic backgrounds. How can these seemingly impossible tasks be accomplished?

The classroom teacher must assume a positive leadership role. The more confident you feel in your knowledge about your students, curriculum, methods of instruction and discipline procedures, the more successful your educational program is likely to be. In order to plan effective lessons, you will want to rely on as much educational data and background information about

the class as possible. This information may be obtained from test results, cumulative records, discussion with other teachers and interviews with students. You may also wish to design and distribute a student inventory at the beginning of the school year, surveying student interests, experiences, spoken languages, favorite subjects, friends, classroom expectations and ability to study at home. You will then be able to use the information students provide in planning your curriculum and organizing learning groups.

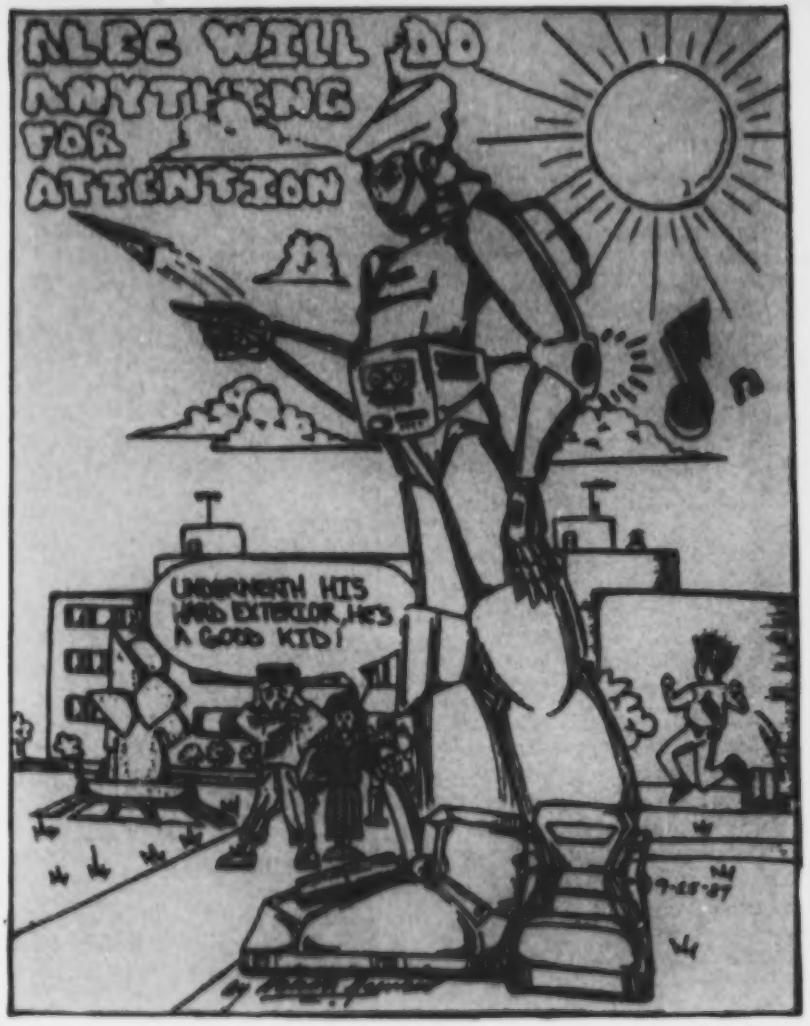
Identifying similarities and differences among students can help you accomplish a maximum number of learning objectives within given time constraints. Explanation and demonstrations in a lesson may be presented to the whole class, rather than by repetition to two or three groups, but in other circumstances, small-group or one-to-one instruction will be more appropriate.

Discipline

The establishment of rules is one of the first steps to managing a classroom efficiently. Students are more likely to implement rules that they have helped develop. The following guidelines should be helpful:

- Limit the number of rules. Five or six positive ones are usually sufficient.
- Solicit students' ideas and suggestions for consideration as rules.
- Design rules that enhance student learning.
- State the rules in language that the students understand.
- Determine in advance the consequences of keeping or breaking the rules.
- Print, display, distribute and sign contracted rules with the students.

"At the beginning of the year—on the very first day, and then each day of the first week—I establish the expectations I have for my students. I make them realistic, sensible and fair. I test students for their understanding of these as I would any other information. Things that routinely need to be addressed, like passes, tardiness, homework assignments, where to get worksheets handed out during an absence, can be handled the first week by outlining a procedure for each."



Nelson Asencio

An effective classroom management system should provide opportunities for group discussion. You may wish to use a combination of class meetings, rap sessions and council meetings to obtain students' opinions on specific topics or problems. Your role at these discussion sessions should be that of guide, moderator and arbitrator.

"Throughout the year as problems arise, I rely on the classroom meeting discussion strategy to help the class determine changes and improvements that need to be made. Classroom meeting rules are established and agreed upon by the total group before discussion begins.

1. Everyone sits in a circle in order to be seen and heard easily.
2. The president of the class or the teacher opens the meeting by stating the area of concern.
3. One person speaks at a time. Each student has the right to be heard. No talking or whispering is allowed. Any student causing a disturbance will be asked to leave the circle.
4. The first time around the circle, everyone can have input on the topic. The second time around, suggestions are made to solve the problem or make changes.

5. The class secretary keeps notes on suggestions made, so that a final decision based on consensus can be reached.

"The classroom-meeting strategy enables students to learn to respect each other's ideas, to listen, and to make decisions that affect the individual as well as the group. It also develops a sense of commitment to the goals that were established the first weeks of school. Students can learn to accept the responsibility for their actions and abide by the decisions they have made."

Teachers can prevent a great many class disruptions by organizing their classrooms at the beginning of the school year. The room and materials should be arranged for orderly progression and movement. Take time to explain to the students the procedures and behaviors you will expect of them.

Plan to provide classroom activities that foster positive teacher/student relationships. All students should be involved in the learning process—not just high-ability students. Developing warm and positive relationships will motivate the class to learn. Small-group and peer teaching activities will help students learn to work cooperatively. Disruptive behavior will be minimized, and learning will be enhanced when students interact positively and support one another's efforts.

"In creating a friendly but task-oriented class, I have found it helpful to grade more than just written work. For example, when a student gives an oral presentation the other students are graded on their listening skills. My students know my point system and know they will lose points if they talk during a presentation by another student. After the presentation I appoint a student to repeat one fact he or she learned from the report, and another student to explain one thing he or she liked about the presentation. This also helps the speaker, who receives at least two positive comments before sitting down."

Unfortunately, every classroom has one—or several—students who provoke negative attention. They seem to set up situations that elicit constant responses from you. Try to play up positive behavior with attention-demanders.

"A few years ago, I began using index cards to communicate with these students, politely asking them to refrain from . . . or begin working on . . . always ending with 'I'll help you if you need it.' Amazingly, the students complied with my written requests. I felt as if I had discovered a magic wand. I carried it further. When a student improved in some way, I'd write a personal note as a compliment and casually drop it on the student's desk. More than once, I have seen an 'incorrigible' retrieve my note from a jacket pocket to reread several times during the class period. One young man even asked me if he could show the note to his mother and probation officer!"

Grouping options: From homogeneous to heterogeneous and everything in between

Students respond best to a variety of techniques, so try to vary your methods from teacher directed (where you are the center of attention) to peer groups to individual projects.

There is no single approach to the grouping of students for instructional purposes. Large groups, small groups and one-to-one pairing are all appropriate at various times. Even with the use of "homogeneous" learning groups you will find great variations in learning style among members of the group, as well as within the individual members. Grouping—in and of itself—is not a panacea for education. What the teacher does with the curriculum in terms of a particular setting will determine how successful the students are in learning.

By collecting, compiling and analyzing data on individual students and on the class as a whole, you will be able to determine how frequently students should be grouped for specific learning needs. Criterion-referenced tests and achievement tests will provide you with information on students' academic strengths and deficits. Your goal in working with any group configuration should be to remediate learning deficits while teaching to the students' strengths.

How often you use groups depends on how comfortable you are with the concept. Some teachers use groups sparingly or not at all, while others use them almost exclusively. Students tend to love group work because they find it stimulating, a worthwhile learning experience, and fun. It involves them in the learning process.

If you think you're going to be using groups during the year, it is probably best to have a group project, such as a reading/writing group roundtable or a study group, in place fairly soon after school starts, just to set the tone. The easiest way to start groups is simply to count off students as they are sitting in the classroom, making a group out of the first four, the second four, and so on. This has the added advantage of letting the kids get acquainted with students they may not know. The two main things you need to stress clearly are what they are to accomplish and each group member's responsibility. You can assign specific tasks to specific group members—who will be the leader, who will be the recorder—or you can let the group decide who will do what. Inform the groups of their objectives, the constraints and procedures. The students should function independently, with the teacher acting as a facilitator, consulted by one member only after the group has tested all possible problem-solving resources. Group evaluation questionnaires filled out by all students at the completion of the project will help keep every student involved and productive.

After you know the students somewhat better and what each one is capable of, you might want to group them according to their skills. Vary your groups both in number and in ability level. You might have pairs working together on spelling; for example, pair a poor speller with a good speller one time, and another time pair a good speller with another good speller. It is also

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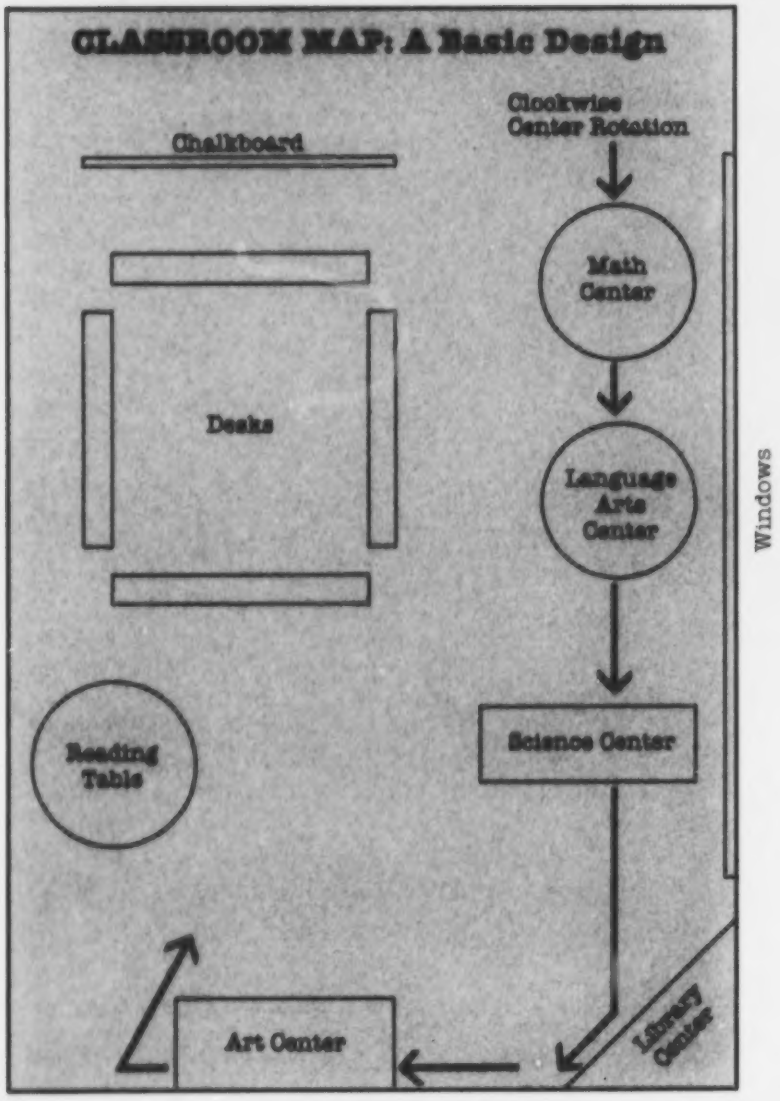
"Don't forget the old adage about form and function."



not a bad idea to put two weaker students together once in a while; they will feel comfortable and will usually work to help one another. When you organize groups of four, you might want to try to put two weaker students with two stronger students; that way, the stronger students are challenged by someone equally strong, while the weaker students benefit from the stronger students' help while feeling comfortable because they are with someone of similar ability. Also, let students choose their own groups once in a while. The easiest way to do this is to post a sign-up sheet divided into groups of four.

Independent projects

Every class subject lends itself, at one time or another, to independent projects. Tasks or activities can be designed for all ability group levels, as well as for selection by students. You may find Bloom's *Taxonomy* a useful resource as you work to design projects for all learning levels. Tasks can be written to address skills at the lowest level (knowledge) or the highest level (evaluation), so that all children can successfully complete projects appropriate to their abilities and interests. Present and discuss guidelines for the completion of independent projects with your students before you initiate the assignment.

"My students do a great deal of writing in journals, learning logs and discussion responses, which I share orally. I carefully choose five papers which cover as many different ability levels as possible. I read all five to the class, then ask for the five 'authors' to pick up their papers—which I have ceremoniously placed on the front table. The class does not know which student wrote which paper, unless the writer wants them to know. I have heard comments like, 'I didn't think he ever did any work,' or 'If she can write like that, then I know I can,' or the truly rewarding, 'I really like your story. You are a good writer.' I love to hear my students compliment each other."

Peer tutoring

Peer tutoring is another management system that promotes student achievement. It offers a vehicle to identify, encourage and give opportunities for students with special abilities to develop their potential, while providing you with the time to work with students with learning problems. An effectively organized peer tutoring program will help you to create a more efficiently managed classroom.

No matter how hard you try, no matter how many different methods you use to get your lesson across, some students are just not going to get it. Others are going to struggle until they halfway understand, but then they have to concentrate on something else as you go on to the next lesson. It is helpful to call on other students to assist at this stage. Other kids can often relate to the problem and put it in terms the faltering student can understand.

You can use peer tutoring on a fairly informal basis in your classroom whenever you sense that your class is split between those who understand and those who are still struggling. Simply designate "helpers," who are excused from a particular assignment but who move around the class offering to help those who are doing the assignment. These helpers can be given a badge to wear, or their names can be written on the board. This frees you to help the students having the greatest difficulty, and allows the others some individual attention from students you know have mastered a particular skill. A second way to use peer tutors is in a more formal situation, where the tutor gets together with his or her assigned student either during class or after school. You might want to offer extra credit for providing such help.

You can usually find tutors in upper grades for students who are really struggling, either through the honor society or through other teachers. You may find an advanced placement teacher who is amenable to allowing some of her students to come into your class and help with groups or individuals. Do not be afraid to ask. Many teachers will be honored, and the students who help almost always respond enthusiastically and seriously to the task at hand.

Peer tutoring within a classroom, or cross-grade peer tutoring can serve to reinforce the skills of the tutor as well as the learner. Peer tutors develop self-confidence and serve as role models for younger children.

Most of us learned by the lecture method, but remember it is only a way to get a lot of information across to a large group of people in a short period of time. There are as many ways beyond lecturing to teach content and skills as there are many different ways to learn. Learning styles will vary within a classroom, and it is helpful to vary your teaching style. By developing a repertoire of teaching strategies, you can better tap the learning styles of all of your students.

"Peer tutoring serves to reinforce the skills of the tutor as well as those of the learner."

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On Becoming a Professional

by David Georgi

Welcome to one of the great professions! As a teacher, you are choosing to devote your life to maintaining the heritage of ideas and ideals of our culture. You are choosing to work with young people and take an active part in shaping the future. You are choosing to join a profession that is dedicated to true service, service to make the world better.

There are those, however, who would argue that teaching is not a profession. In fact, there is currently a national debate raging on how to make teaching a profession, implying that it is not one. In order to act like a professional, you need to know something about this debate and the issues it raises.

Let's start with the origin of the term "profession," which began in the medieval period. In those days, when embarking on a career, you made a profession of faith that your life's work would be to glorify God and improve the lot of humanity in the process. That was your "profession."

In subsequent centuries, the term profession lost much of its original altruistic meaning. In current usage, the meaning of profession is associated with a job that yields a high level of income.

Historically, in the United States, public education was begun to safeguard democratic institutions by providing a literate electorate able to make complex social and political decisions. John Dewey pointed out that education was the only social institution responsible for teaching people how to think critically. Other institutions, like the family, church and industry, all demanded that the individual's thinking conform to its needs. The role of teacher, then, is critical to the working of a democratic society in which individuals make up their own minds.

Despite the importance of the role of teacher, American society has failed to provide teachers with the status given comparable professions. The causes of this failure are complex, and a few historical perspectives may shed some light. In assigning relative significance to ideas versus materialism, a frontier society often tilted toward materialism. Thus, teachers were less important than bankers. Likewise, when most people were struggling for existence, concern for educating children was of secondary importance. On another level, teaching was historically one of the few professions open to women. At a time when women were not accorded equal status with men, such a "woman's" profession would have a stigma attached to it. Placing schools under local control put local citizens in the position of choosing between taxing themselves more for better schools, or keeping the dollars in their pockets. This developed into the tradition of increasing funds to schools only in the case of some "crisis."

Whatever the origins of the low status of teaching are, the sad fact remains that teaching currently ranks among the least esteemed professions. All this seems to be changing, however. A recognition that top-quality education is essential to both our democratic heritage and our economic well-being is being expressed across the nation. The current situation is truly exciting.

In the last four years, a number of national reports all arrived at the same basic conclusion: teaching must become a true profession in the modern as well as the medieval sense of the term. To achieve this status, the following objectives must be attained:

1. Teachers must take control of their profession. Suggestions include: passing a comprehensive, appropriately designed exam similar to the bar exam taken by lawyers; being "board certified" by colleagues in the same field, like physicians in specialized areas; using peer

evaluation, as in other professions; requiring stringent internship programs utilizing the skills of master teachers while insuring relevant and quality instruction for new teachers; entering into "trust agreements" with school boards outside the area of collective bargaining to expand the influence of teachers over their situations.

2. Working conditions must be raised to the levels of comparable professions. Teachers must have the opportunity for collegial relations with other teachers. Teachers need secretarial assistance, office space, appropriate office technology, and opportunities for professional development like sabbaticals and fellowships.

3.Teachers must have salaries comparable to other professionals. Adequate educational funding is essential for national security as well as our economic and political future; legislators must be made to act on this reality.

Across the nation, school districts and states are experimenting with new ways of upgrading the profession. Mentor teacher programs, teacher certification reform, new approaches to evaluating teacher performance, teacher training improvements, and giving teachers more power to run the schools—these and more innovative programs are starting to flesh out what the new profession will look like.

How can you participate in this effort to professionalize teaching?

First, you have the responsibility to be informed about the issues. Join professional organizations such as teacher unions and subject matter associations. Know what is happening on your local level. Understand your contract. Encourage your union to take progressive stands on the issues. You also have an obligation to remain informed about issues facing your colleagues on a state, national, and international level. With knowledge comes the emotional energy that precedes commitment to action.

Second, you have a responsibility to act to improve things. Join committees on subjects that interest you. Be politically active on school-related issues. Use your classroom as a research laboratory: study better ways to teach and keep records. Write down your results. Publish them, if appropriate. You also have a community obligation to use your skills outside the school. Be active in organizations that are important to you. By such actions, you not only meet all levels of professional obligation, you also provide an excellent role model for your students.

Third, you must continue to improve your professional skills. One of the best things about teaching is that you never run out of skills to improve. The best antidote to "burnout" is developing an enthusiasm for constantly improving your knowledge of subject matter and instructional technique. This enthusiasm can be sustained by identifying areas of interest and seeking out quality training. Many in-service programs are good, and some provide stipends. As a professional, you should give serious consideration to acquiring advanced degrees. As you develop skills, you should also consider disseminating your ideas via publications, presentations at professional meetings, and entrepreneurship.

In conclusion, this is a great time to be a teacher. Conditions are changing. Teaching is on the cutting edge of the great social changes that are occurring. This generation of teachers may see teaching become a profession, not only in its medieval sense but also in its modern sense.

5 Resources—
Types and Sources

A personal history

Last year, Great Star taught my third graders how the Wampanoag people say thank you (taubut). Local artist Allan Rohan Crite told us about his long and creative life in our South End neighborhood. The class cooked plantains with Noemi's mother, and Amanda's mother made an album for the photos from our "Experience is Best" program.

I haven't always been an activist teacher. For years, I followed a closed-door policy. Naturally, in the teachers' room and during parents' nights congeniality was my middle name. Parents and other "intruders" with appointments were welcomed. And my kids always enjoyed their year-end field trip. But when I entered my school, just minutes from downtown Boston, I closed the door on a wealth of commercial, cultural, and academic resources. When I entered my classroom, I closed the door on collegial, parental, and administrative talent.

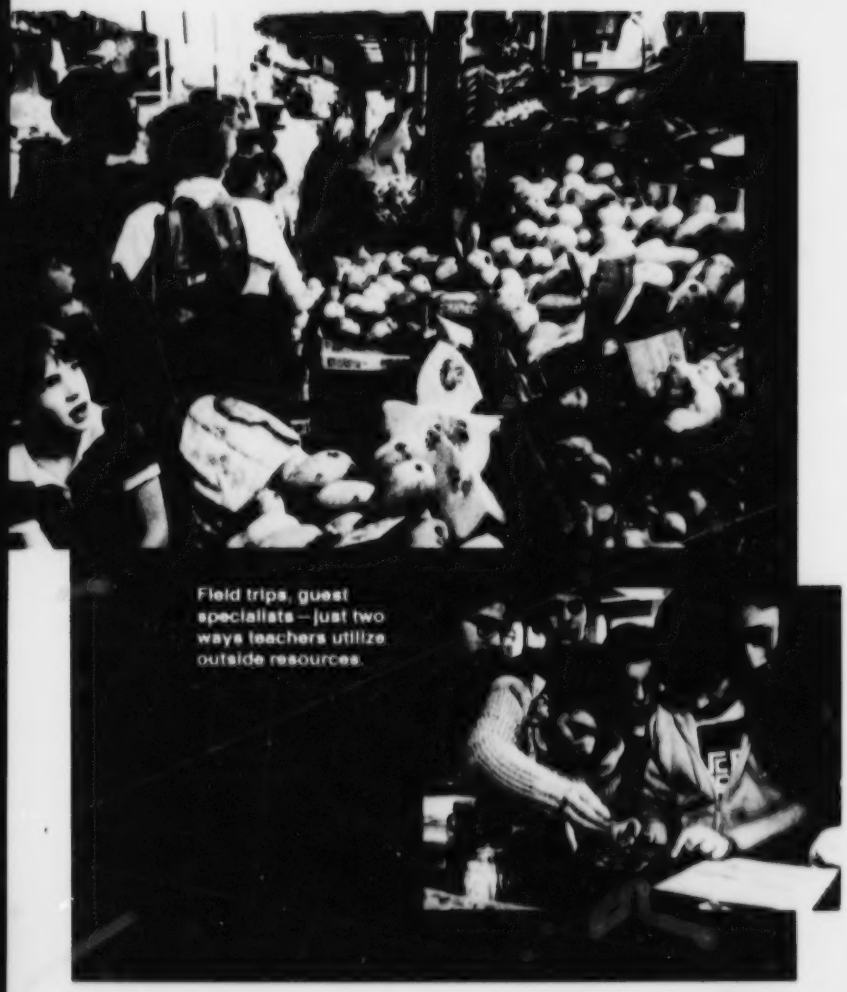
From a philosophical perspective, the Boston Writing Project (BWP) at the University of Massachusetts was responsible for my conversion. Two courses at BWP, an offshoot of the National Writing Project, University of California at Berkeley, persuaded me that young and adult writers must resort to personal experiences. It was up to me to broaden my pupils' existential repertoires.

"Please...I'd rather do it myself!" That could have been my motto. Super-teaching meant research, making contacts, arranging classroom visits, and organizing prewriting jaunts. I even dipped into personal funds for publishing materials. No one respects a martyr. Once, at a BWP response group (where we talk about our own writing process and classroom approaches), a fellow-teacher interrupted my complaints about typing student stories. "Get some parents interested," she suggested. "Encourage older students to use Bank Street Writer—or another word processing program—with your kids." Her advice opened my eyes—and my doors. Gradually, I devised the following resource utilization model which I call "The Three C's":

1. **COORDINATE** curriculum objectives with business, state and university institutions sponsoring teacher grants. The resulting cash flow underwrites the impossible bus trip, the occasional poetry reading. Bonding to the educational money market does involve proposal writing, but style and fluency improve with each venture. Caution: Going the grantmaking route is time-consuming. Also, it is highly competitive. Check with The Foundation Center, 79 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10003, (212) 620-4230 for guidance.
2. **COLLABORATE** with groups that already have developed programs in specific interest areas. Why reinvent the wheel when volunteers, 4H agencies, museums, nature centers, and historical societies do it better? Releasing the reins can include some sacrifice of control but saves endless planning hours. Representatives from outside organizations like conferences. I meet with liaison personnel during the rare moments of in-school "free" time. The working lunch is part of my every day. Collaboration also involves some in-class field testing and observation. That does not mean every Ph.D. candidate can enter Room 207 and study the linguistic patterns of students and teacher. But when an exciting center like our local Children's Museum opens its facilities to parents, students, and teachers, I, in turn, share my operational space with their curriculum specialists. I am fussy about reciprocity, and I believe in successful trade-offs.
3. **COOPERATE** with the entire school community. Teachers, students, parents, paraprofessionals, and administrators who plan goals and work toward the exploration of the outside world can eliminate the adversarial paralysis of "us versus them." Why should a knowledgeable administrator or a curriculum expert from a different department be resented or ignored? Spreading in-system wealth is our most valuable resource.

Getting the most mileage

Your approaches to community organizations and local businesses can yield information and free materials, as well as funds. Banks and utility companies, environmental preservation groups, chambers of commerce, and such service



Field trips, guest specialists—just two ways teachers utilize outside resources.

providers as hospitals, doctors, and dentists, are often willing and able to plan joint activities that are of great benefit to students. Small businesses and large corporations donate materials and equipment. When executive offices are redecorated, companies are eager to pass on such items as carpeting and "outmoded" equipment. Some corporations sponsor free performances and excursions for schools. Call business or corporate public relations offices, and ask to speak to a community relations manager.

Parent groups can offer direct help, and suggest sources unknown to those teachers who do not live in the community where they teach. "I have had excellent results getting speakers, film programs, and outright gifts of money to finance school projects. It is truly satisfying to 'win' thousands, hundreds, or even a few dollars for one's school."

Trips increase resources in what might be described as a geometric progression; they push the walls of the classroom way out into the community and beyond. If your school district does not have a list of recommended field trips, start an annotated list of your own, working with other teachers, your administrative staff, parents, and public officials. Throughout the country, computer databases are being developed to record information on cultural opportunities and trips of all kinds. But a human network of responsive educators willing and able to make a variety of out-of-the-classroom experiences accessible to students is essential.

Teacher centers bring new and experienced teachers together to explore teaching materials and techniques. They may produce informative publications, offer in-service courses for teachers, and support educational excellence. A combination of library and laboratory, a teacher center can be located in a school, on a college campus, or in any one of many public and private facilities. Computer networks, with forums and bulletin boards, further extend the scope and reach of the teacher-center concept and expand exponentially the resources of new teachers with access to modems.

But no matter how rich the store of resources may be, it is like unmined gold; until you dig for it, it remains useless. Good luck to you; chances are that if you are reading this book, you are already on your way to being not only a teacher who employs a vast array of resources but also one who will soon have much to contribute for the pleasure, enlightenment and success of other teachers.

Help and How to Get It

Since the best classroom materials are not confined to the annual book order, getting your money's worth in the educational market depends on researching available programs and comparison shopping. Buying into local and national groups, which may or may not charge for membership and/or subscriptions, means first retrieving and reviewing free brochures, directories, catalogs, and bibliographies. It pays if informed colleagues share the search, the sources, and the resulting purchases. Whether the resource is a curriculum guide, an article, or a program of activities, the discriminating shopper relies on instinct and passion for a subject, considers students' needs and interests, and incorporates some of the school's stated curriculum. As a first step in gaining access to our nation's great and endless educational resources, write or call the following organizations (they may also have local branches in your community):

American Association of Museums
1225 Eye Street, N.W., Suite 200
Washington, D.C. 20005
(202) 289-1818

- for catalog listing all U.S. children's museums, science museums: *The Official Museum Directory*; available in most reference libraries

American Federation of Teachers
555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001
(202) 879-4400

- for free catalog of publications and members' magazine, *American Educator*

Cooperative Extensions
(Contact your state university for site location.)

- 4-H youth development programs are located in counties across the U.S. and are part of the cooperative extension programs of all land grant or state universities

Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)
Clearing House on Urban Education
Teachers College/Columbia University
Box 40
New York, NY 10027
(212) 678-3433

- for *ERIC Ready Reference #6* listing 16 clearinghouses, with complete addresses and brief descriptions

IMPACT II National
285 West Broadway
New York, NY 10013
(212) 966-5582

- for copies of *IMPACT II Star*** newsletter and *Teachers Catalog of Creative Program Ideas* ($10.)

Institute for Responsive Education
605 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA 02215
(617) 353-3309

- for free catalog *Publications, Resources and Services: Schools and Communities Working Together* and magazine *Equity and Choice* ($15 annual subscription)

National Audubon Society
Environment Education Center
613 Riversville Road
Greenwich, CT 06831
(203) 869-5272

- for National Audubon Society annual report listing major Audubon facilities; also fact sheets on Audubon Adventures, a nationwide program for young people

National Education Association
1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 833-4000

- for access to department offering research services and communications, along with the monthly newspaper *NEA Today*

National School Volunteers Project
701 North Fairfax Street, Suite 320
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 836-4880

- for information on organizing new programs

National Wildlife Federation
1325 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20005
(202) 797-6800

- for information on several science and natural history curriculum guides: *Naturescope* and *Class Project*; activities: *See and Do Kit*; youth magazines: *Your Big Backyard* and *Ranger Rick*

National Writing Project
5627 Tolman Hall
School of Education
University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720
(415) 642-0963

- for brochure on 17 writing sites; annual sponsorship ($25.) including *The Quarterly*; significant for teacher researchers and writers

Polaroid Education Program
28 Osborn Street
Cambridge, MA 02139
(617) 577-4035

- for information on free camera and *Aim, Click, Learn* curriculum

Smithsonian Institution
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
Arts and Industry Bldg.
Room 1163
900 Jefferson Drive, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20560
(202) 357-3249

- for information on museums, publications, activities, tours

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Community and Intergovernmental Relations
Public Information Center
401 M Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20460
(202) 382-2028

- for several youth publications and information on President's Environmental Youth Awards

Professional Organizations You May Want To Join

Council for Exceptional Children
1920 Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091
(703) 620-3660

International Reading Association
800 Barksdale Road
P.O. Box 8139
Newark, DE 19714
(302) 731-1600

National Council for the Social Studies
3501 Newark Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20016
(202) 966-7840

National Council of Teachers of English
1111 Kenyon Road
Urbana, IL 61801
(217) 328-3870

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics
1906 Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091
(703) 620-9840

THE FIELD TRIP INTERVIEW... Some suggestions for students

1. Always be prepared with a variety of questions.
2. Establish a friendly atmosphere.
3. Use a strong, clear voice. (Remember, you must reach the whole group.)
4. Possible areas of interest:
   - Give us a brief job description.
   - How did you choose your job?
   - What are some advantages of your line of work?
   - What are some disadvantages of your line of work?
   - What is the salary range (average beginning and ending salary)?
   - What are some other career possibilities related to your job?
   - What is the future for your line of work?
5. Concerning the establishment:
   - What is the history of this establishment?
   - What is its importance in the community or business world?
   - What are its future plans?
6. Continue the interview with other relevant questions.

You May Want to Subscribe To These Magazines:

Art Education, Learning, Instructor, Smithsonian, Natural History, Phi Delta Kappan for teachers, and *Ranger Rick, Highlights,* and *Cricket* for children.

All of these magazines are in libraries, and free examination for teachers may be available on request, along with useful, give-away items such as an invitation to subscribe.

Resource Checklist

Teachers are busy people, and quite often they find themselves too busy to investigate how they can bring into their classrooms additional resources that would enhance their teaching and add variety and interest to the curriculum. Too often resources are overlooked that are quite close at hand and easy to obtain. Some easy-to-find resources available in your community are as follows, and maybe this list will get you thinking about some that may have been overlooked:

- ☐ newspapers
- ☐ diaries (check local historical societies and museums)
- ☐ journals (check your local colleges or university)
- ☐ government documents (library reference is helpful here)
- ☐ photographs (again, museums are good resources)
- ☐ artworks (museums of art)
- ☐ letters
- ☐ artifacts (museums of natural history)
- ☐ periodicals
- ☐ newsletters
- ☐ special reviews (check special groups or societies)
- ☐ historical society
- ☐ chamber of commerce—often has lists of businesses that are resources to teachers
- ☐ art museum, historical museum—sources of classroom materials; offer tours and have trained docents available to interpret programs to students (Many museums have outreach programs and will send docents into classrooms.)
- ☐ local societies like the Audubon Society and the Humane Society; offer resources such as films, speakers and curriculum materials for all grade levels
- ☐ county courthouse; offers a law tour led by a trained docent, as well as mock trial suitable for students in the upper grades
- ☐ park rangers and environmental groups (such as the Sierra Club); valuable resources
- ☐ local utility companies, such as the gas and electric and telephone companies; offer a list of free films, speakers, units on special topics such as energy conservation
- ☐ major oil companies; offer tours, some of their offshore platforms
- ☐ local zoo; sends out curriculum materials; offers tours with trained guides
- ☐ local businesses; often involved in partnerships with schools, and are valuable resources to teachers (Check with your local industry-education council or chamber of commerce.)
- ☐ Check to see if special directories are available; i.e., science resource directory.
- ☐ speakers bureaus at junior colleges and universities; offer speakers for all grade levels and in many subject areas (Call their offices of public information for more information.)
- ☐ county parks; often have naturalists, and sometimes geologists, on staff (Check to see what they offer to teachers.)

Look around you and you will find an abundance of resources in your community, usually only a phone call away. Here are two books that may also be helpful:

Cook, Sue C. and Thompson, Virginia. *Experience-Based Learning: How to Make the Community Your Classroom.* Portland, Oregon: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1981.

Wurman, Richard Saul, Ed. *Yellow Pages of Learning Resources.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1972. If you need help on how to identify the resources in your community, this is the book for you. The book not only identifies the resources found in a typical community but tells what students can learn from visiting them or bringing them into the classroom.

Professionalism: You Get What You Pay For

by Betty Myers

Professionalism is a word much bandied about in teacher circles. What does it actually entail—this professionalism? In many places the word has lost its real meaning because for so long, among so many people, teachers have been regarded as public servants. During the Great Depression, in some cities teachers were actually asked to teach free! Most of these were unmarried ladies. There are no actual recorded deaths resulting from not being paid, so we may assume that these virtuous ladies had some extra help with their food and rent.

The general attitude that teachers run across among the civilian population is that "anyone can teach." Since the majority of people attended school at one time or another in their lives, they think that standing in front of a group of children who are doing busy work is the way you do it. Some school districts are so desperate for teachers that they will put "warm bodies," who are either working for a degree or who have a degree in another field, into classroom situations where they have little or no experience, and where they enjoy little or no success.

In recent years, studies such as those by the Rand Corporation and Carnegie Task Force have repeatedly sounded the warning that the general tenor

Jolanta Pienczykowski

of candidates entering the teaching profession today is substandard, and the reason for this is plain: the monetary rewards for one of the most difficult jobs in the world are completely inadequate. In Los Angeles, a beginning locksmith with the city school system makes over $11,000 more than a beginning teacher! Why is there such disparity among the professions? Why is it that the vital professionals who educate America's children are not paid on a par with other professionals?

Teachers are wondrous beings. We are responsible for dental health, patriotism, drug abuse resistance, child abuse reporting, grading report cards, and keeping voluminous amounts of paper work demanded from us by our boards of education and by the state governments. We are asked to do extra work for no money. We are expected to keep upgrading our own education, and we are also expected to pay for it ourselves. Some teachers even pay for their own supplies because they cannot get them from their particular school, or because the red tape involved is just too much of a hassle.

A real professional in the teaching field is a glorious thing working daily magic in a class of 30 or so students, each of whom has a different capacity and learning speed. This professional leads these 30 minds through 9 months of learning, and at the end of that time, along with some English and mathematics, has perhaps instilled values, insights and the seeds of integrity.

The truly dedicated cannot and should not ever have to subsist on people's thanks. Thanks is terrific, but money is better. Money is what says to you: you are a person deserving of respect and honor because you know what you are doing. You know how to transfer a body of knowledge into children's minds, while at the same time maintaining a high level of discipline and motivation.

Because most really great teachers love teaching, how then do we attract the really great people to our profession? We lose many good male teachers to administration because they know they cannot support a family on a teacher's income. In like manner, teaching for women is no longer a supplement to a husband's income. Because of economic and social changes, the woman is often the sole support of a family.

We must get the best and the brightest from the colleges and universities all over the United States. There are many bright people who would make terrific teachers, but teaching comes off as a second class profession, unrespected by the masses and significantly underpaid in proportion to the product produced. Surely, a call for higher salaries for teachers is not unreasonable in a rich country like ours; one that rewards men wearing shorts who can throw a ball through a hoop with million-dollar contracts.

And where will these teachers come from? To take our very best university students into the teaching profession will have the long-term result of a better product: the educated person. We must build our profession by standing up strongly for increased salaries, for teacher participation in decision making, and for teacher input in curriculum development and textbook selection. The principal-centered school is on its way out. A school run by professionals who are paid for their highly developed skills is the future for the 21st century. The movers and shakers of that century, those whose decisions will help shape the destiny of millions of Americans and citizens of our global world, are sitting in classrooms all over America today. The president we will elect in 2020 may well be a ten-year-old in one of those classrooms. Is that ten-year-old getting the best, or is she getting the cheapest?

6 Parents as Partners

Rob Schoenbaum

The role of teachers has expanded greatly over the past 25 years. Historically, a teacher's primary focus was providing children with the best educational program possible. The home environment provided everything else. But today, with the increase in single-parent families and families with two working parents, schools and teachers are the major contributors not only to much of the child's learning but also to his or her day-to-day care. In addition to providing an educational program, schools have become responsible for the physical care of the children, breakfast and lunch programs, and day care before and after school, giving teachers additional responsibilities beyond the traditional educational aspects.

Bringing parents and teachers together is hard work. Although a large number of parents want to participate in school programs,they are waiting to be asked. Teachers, more than ever, need to invite parents to become involved. They need to let parents know that they want and value their support. And parents, more than ever, need to accept the open school invitation and let teachers know that their commitment is valued and respected.

Parents expect from teachers a commitment to the highest standards of professional competence. They also expect teachers to be accountable for their children's outcomes in education; in other words, to be responsible for the results of their instructional programs. No less a commitment is required of the parents. They also share in accountability for the outcome of their children's education. One way for parents to become more involved in the education of their child, for example, is to oversee the student's homework. They should not only ask their child if homework has been assigned, but should also ask to see the completed assignment.

The result of a partnership can be parents and teachers sharing the responsibility that helps parents to better support not only the academic growth of the students, but also their social and emotional growth. A consistent, joint effort on the part of the home and the school is the key to maintaining self-esteem, building skills and promoting positive behavior in children.

As teachers, it is valuable to realize the power we wield in the parent-teacher relationship. We play the key role in developing the communication network for this important link between home and school. Through clear explanations of responsibilities and goals, this support system can be enhanced throughout the school year.

In order to establish this partnership, several avenues of communication should be explored. One ideal time for presenting information is during back to school night meetings. Letters to parents are an additional means of fostering a partnership. Another obvious connection that we sometimes overlook is communication through the student. At times, you may have to send a note home with a progress report. Having to bring in a signed statement that both parent and student have read the letter can be treated as a homework assignment.

Open lines of communication can foster a strong school-home

support system. Encourage the parent to provide a home environment that complements your expectations for his or her child, and welcome feedback that will help you in dealing with student concerns. Parents will provide pertinent information about their children, if they are convinced it will benefit their children's progress in school. Clear lines of communication can build a trusting partnership between parents and teachers.

Many parents are just as concerned as teachers about building support between the family and school. In order to maintain a good relationship, parents expect teachers to share their child's mishaps and progress with equal enthusiasm and regularity. It is imperative that parents and teachers communicate on a regular basis, and it is helpful if the teacher can be flexible when scheduling conference meeting times to meet the needs of working parents. An important note: Now that you have made yourself accessible, when a parent contacts you, always respond quickly! An immediate return of a parent phone call will be a big help toward building a good working relationship.

As the role of the teacher and the school increases and becomes more diversified, it is necessary that we maximize family support and involve parents in student academic achievement and school successes. We share a mutuality of goals toward increased self-esteem and academic success for the children. This is the challenge and the promise.

Parent conferences

Parent conferences continue to be an important element in the school-home partnership. Generally, they are an opportunity for teachers to learn more about their students. Trust by the parents will be strengthened if they know they are considered the expert when it comes to understanding their child. Additionally, it is important for parents to realize that the school is aware of the difficulties and challenges of parenting, and that teachers are available with information and support when needed.

"Joint undertakings stand a better chance when they benefit both sides."

Euripides

As you face parent conferences, remember there is no enemy! No matter how uncomfortable a parent conference or "confrontation" may seem, keep in mind that we are all in this for essentially the same goal—the education of a young person.

"Whenever I am faced with a tough conference, I spend some quiet time imagining how I would feel if I were the parent of the young person in question. Is the student bright but irresponsible? Is the student hostile or uncommunicative? Is the student truly a slow learner who will always have difficulty with this subject?"

You may decide, quite accurately, that the parent is at fault for not teaching responsibility or for causing the child's stress. But try to remember, it is quite painful to face your own child's lack of success in school; it is even more painful to accept the fact that you might be part of the problem. So when you sit down, be prepared to offer a sympathetic ear, some words of understanding for the pain the parent is experiencing, and a willingness to try some of the parent's suggestions as well. Offer your own solutions—not as mandates or subtle judgments, but as helpful ideas.

It is true that parents are hoping a teacher will offer a miracle. But more often than not, they recognize our humanity; in the face of true understanding, most parents are friendly, helpful, and quite reasonable. It is a good idea to ask the parent if the child has had problems in other classes. Invariably, the answer will be "yes," which depersonalizes the situation and makes problem-solving a bit more objective. If you sense an adversarial situation, it is really your responsibility to defuse it and to create an environment where the primary goal—helping a young person—can be met.

"I think it helps to build a strong supportive bond with parents by inviting them to come to school, two or three at a time, for different activities throughout the school year, rather than limiting visits to parent conferences and once or twice a year for big group events. In our classroom, we've established a brown bag lunch policy. For one day each month, I am available in my classroom during lunch period for parents to drop by for a quick visit, possibly on their lunch hour, just to see what's going on. These lunches are to keep in touch, and not to be thought of as a conference. Parents often enjoy meeting other parents, and discussing similar concerns."

A parent workshop

Many teachers find that organizing a parent workshop is a useful adjunct to their classroom activities. The workshop may be used to get acquainted, answer questions about the curriculum, plan class activities, explain marking procedures, ease anxiety about school, and suggest ways in which classroom activities can be reinforced at home.

You need enough time to prepare and to promote the workshop to parents. The date and time you select will depend upon conditions and needs. You must consider working parents, travel time, and other school functions. Serving simple refreshments (homemade cookies, juice), making paper and pencils available, and having an attractive classroom are definite assets.

The promotion of the workshop is an effective means of making parents aware of your commitment to education, and to parent involvement. Involve your students in publicizing the workshop. The students may design invitations that they can carry home, or that you can mail. They can make posters to put on refrigerators at home. An announcement may be made in the parent association newsletter.

If you can get parents to respond in advance, you will be able to plan more effectively (seating, refreshments, pencils). To facilitate this, your printed invitations/an-

nouncements should include a tear-off and a suggested deadline date for its return. When possible, offer an alternative date and time. Be sure to include the subject of the workshop, the date, time and location, and the name and telephone number of a contact person, ideally a class parent.

Planning includes both setting up the agenda and making the logistical arrangements. First, identify the audience needs. Formulate clear objectives, and structure the agenda accordingly. The format should meet the needs of the audience and of the presenter. You should allow for group discussion and a question-and-answer period. It is also a good idea to explore the possibility of inviting a guest speaker—the principal, the computer specialist, the librarian, the guidance counselor, the remediation teacher—to a subsequent workshop.

It is important to keep track of the topics and questions that are of interest to the parents. Ask the assistance of a class parent or a paraprofessional to record questions and topics raised by the workshop participants. Invite feedback from the participants by using a questionnaire or an evaluation form. Keep a file of invitations, workshop minutes, a list of resource persons, and other pertinent data.

The first workshop is the best resource for planning future activities and for deciding upon appropriate follow-up. If your first workshop experience is successful, you might consider holding regular monthly or bimonthly meetings. If it is not, do not despair. Evaluate your problems, revamp your procedure, and try again.

Communicating with the adolescent's parent

At the middle and high school levels, it is sometimes hard to involve the parent directly with the student. The "job" of adolescence, after all, is to separate from the parents and experiment with taking responsibility and accepting the consequences of one's own actions. These years can be crucial ones for parents. They may begin to question the extent of their involvement in their child's school. Not wanting to be "over-protective," or to interfere, they may feel unsure about their role in their child's educational process. This can be particularly true if their child is moving from a self-contained elementary classroom to the multi-teacher configuration of the middle or junior high school. For this reason, it is particularly important to make a special effort to let the parents know how valuable their involvement is.

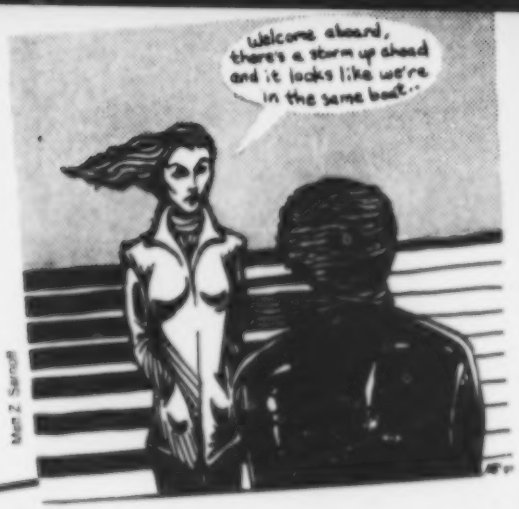
"I want parents to feel welcome in the class, and I want students to feel comfortable having them there. Shared activities seem to be a good way to overcome parent and student self-consciousness. Whenever possible we have parents help us with special activities—timing for the jog-a-thon, assisting at the bake sales, going on field trips. Additionally, it's fun to invite parents to join us in some class lessons. Most students welcome the chance to show off for their parents by teaching them how to use a program on the computer or how to do an art activity. It also works well to have a parent come in to demonstrate a particular skill, or teach a special lesson. Our journal writing project was greatly enhanced by having a parent come in as a special guest, and present us with a family journal written in the 1800s. Family interviews, biographies, and research projects are a few of the ways that the experiences of parents can be integrated into the children's educational program."

Having the support of a parent in the background can be quite helpful. The parent's knowledge of your philosophy and your expectations will keep the parent a partner in the process. And it will be appreciated. After all, parents are often kept in the dark by their teens. They will be grateful to the teacher who hands out at the fall open house, or sends home for a signature, an explanation of the class philosophy and teaching expectations. In such a handout or letter, you might:

- Introduce yourself, and describe your background.
- **Express your eager anticipation for the year and/or subject you teach.**
- Include a brief statement of your educational philosophy.
- Give the year's schedule, in brief.
- Describe the types of class activities, methods of evaluation, homework, and class rules.
- Sign off with an invitation to the parent to contact you with any concerns. You may provide your home phone number; it depends on you and the community.
- Ask for both parent and student signatures, indicating that they have read your letter. Provide a space for comments.

How do you get the attention of busy parents and enlist their support? Here are eight essentials to help you begin.

1. **Be positive.** Parents want the same thing you do for their children: a good education. You will win support if you let them know you expect that you and your students will have a successful, productive year. They will want to be part of the good things happening for their children.
2. **Meet parents more than half way.** Begin in September to reach out to parents. Try to make contact by telephone with a parent of every student in your class, core subjects, or homeroom by the end of the month. Phoning parents takes time, yet a five-minute conversation can open the door to a yearlong partnership with benefits for all concerned. Parents will be more willing to share vital information and support you should problems arise.
3. **Clarify expectations—yours and theirs.** Let parents know how you will direct the learning in your classroom, and what you expect from your students. What are your goals for the class? What are your class rules and grading system? When will report cards come home? Do parents come to school for conferences? Can a



September 8, 1989

Dear Parents:

It is a pleasure to have your child in my math class. To start the year off right, I am sending you the homework and grading procedures. Please read them and return the tear-off sheet below. Keep the top for your records.

MATH HOMEWORK PROCEDURES

School
- Homework will be given Monday-Thursday.
- All assignments will be written on the board and thoroughly explained.
- Students will work problems similar to the homework assignment.

Home
- Assist your child where necessary, but do not do his/her work.
- Check and sign homework.
- If three unsatisfactory homework papers are not returned, I will call home.

GRADING SCALE

95–100	A
85–94	B
75–84	C
70–74	D
0–69	F

TERM AVERAGES

Unit Tests = 70%

Daily Grades
Homework = 30%

UNIT TESTS

Unit tests will be announced and material reviewed a day in advance. Scores will be sent home when available from computer.

Very truly yours,

Ms. Grayson, Math Teacher
School Number - 922-0375 (2:30-3:30 p.m.)
Home Number - 983-6543 (5:30-9:00 p.m.)

Please return this portion.

Student _____

Date _____

Dear Ms. Grayson:

I read your letter concerning homework and grading procedures.

☐ I will encourage my child to adhere to these procedures.

☐ I would like to schedule a conference to discuss math homework and grading procedures further.

I can come to school at _____ p.m. on _____

Please call me at home/work at _____ p.m. on _____

I will call you at home/school at _____ p.m. on _____

Telephone Numbers

Very truly yours,

Home _____

Work _____

_____
Parent's signature

telephone conference be arranged in place of a meeting at school? When will tests be given in spelling and math? Will you take field trips or stage special performances? Will parents be invited? How can parents arrange to observe your class during the school day? What can parents do if their child is having difficulty with you or your class? How can parents support you? Send a short letter home to let parents know who you are, and what you expect. Invite them to respond with their expectations for the year.

4. **Encourage all parents to take part in their child's learning.** Let them know how important they are to their child's success. Help them feel welcome at school. Inform parents about their child's progress by sending corrected work home regularly. Keep a folder for each student's work, which can be sent home, signed by a parent after review and returned to school.

5. **Be realistic and flexible in your expectations.** For some parents, reasonable involvement may be limited to reading school notices, signing homework assignments and talking with their child about school. Others will be willing to save yogurt containers and supply cupcakes for holiday celebrations. A few may volunteer as room parents, tutors or field trip assistants. Be ready to acknowledge all parents' efforts to support you.

6. **Let parents know what kind of help you need and the amount of time they will be committing for each activity.** Ask them for their support. Begin the year with a survey to identify parents who want to actively participate. Find out what interests and talents they can offer your class. It may be helpful to plan an introductory meeting to orient classroom volunteers.

7. **Provide guidelines to help with homework.** Include ideas that fit your personal and school homework policy. These are a few to consider:

   - Students are responsible for understanding their assignments. Homework, as you will assign it, is an extension of activities in your classroom. Students will practice concepts and processes you have introduced and explained, or they will use ideas from your classroom as a foundation for creating something new or exploring a subject further. You do not expect parents to teach or try to guess what you are asking their child to do.
   - If a child forgets his or her book or does not remember how to complete an assignment, parents can make this a learning experience by helping the child think through the steps or options for solving the problem. Can the child write down what he or she does not understand and ask you the next day? Can he or she call a classmate to clarify the assignment? This avoids dependence on parents and confusion for students whose parents explain subject matter in a different way than you have taught it.
   - Completing homework assignments is the child's responsibility. You will work with students who do not complete homework to find out why, and hopefully correct the situation.
   - You will not expect parents to know the answers to all their child's homework questions. They can best support you by helping the child figure out where to find the answer. Depending on your students' ages, you may ask parents to help with the spelling of unfamiliar words, or to suggest using a dictionary. You might recommend purchasing a few basic reference books, depending on parents' means and the ages of your students.
   - Explain the difference between long- and short-term assignments. Let parents know you expect students to work within a schedule for longer assignments. If it seems appropriate, ask parents to sign daily assignments and weekly progress checks on long-term homework.
   - Ask parents not to correct their child's homework. This helps to discourage an overzealous parent from taking on the assignment and relieving the child of his responsibility. Tell parents that you must see the child's independent work to know whether he or she understands the assignment. Parents can help best by showing interest in their children's work, emphasizing the importance of homework and providing a time and place to study.
   - Invite parents' comments on homework, especially when they feel your assignments are too difficult or too easy. You may want to designate an hour or two each week as a telephone conference time. Encourage parents not to wait for formal conferences to talk with you about their concerns.

8. **Encourage communication and mutual support.** You will find opportunities all year long to show parents you value their information and support. Once you have reached out to them, communicated your expectations and understood theirs, encourage them to inform you about situations which may cause problems for their child in school. These include the death of a pet, friend or family member; divorce; separation; relocation; or the birth of a brother or sister. This may be the only way you will find out about an important event in their lives.

Many parents do not have time to give to their child's school. But all parents want a good education for their child. Show parents they are important, and encourage them to participate. They will respond positively in any way they can. And you, the parents and the students, will all have a more enjoyable year.

A Dialogue on Professionalism

by Vincent Bono and Eileen G. Krieg

Bono: There is an unwritten rule in the United States Congress called "freshman courtesy," which states, in effect, that a newly-elected senator or representative should maintain a low profile throughout his or her first year in office and not become "too involved."

I was told about this concept on the first day at my newly assigned school, and I obeyed the rule—why I'll never know. However, from the onset of my second year to the present time, 20 years later, I have become involved with a vengeance.

Staying out of the limelight for that initial year does have its good points: you observe, you listen, you develop rapport with fellow teachers and you grow. Similarly, freshman courtesy has its disadvantages. A creative, idealistic mind might be stifled. And, if one gets too set in such a laissez-faire attitude, the stifling might continue for years to come, thus shutting out forever the valid contribution a teacher could have made.

Krieg: Teaching is by no means an easy profession. It has its good days and bad days. Sometimes we need an outlet to maintain our perspective and sanity and to satisfy a certain something within us, no matter how long we have been in "the system."

So it was with a sense of adventure that I answered an announcement from the principal posted over the teacher's time clock: Wanted—faculty member to initiate and be advisor to a future teachers club. Although I had been a teacher for only a short while, I truly felt I had something to offer. I was 40+, a wife, a mother of two teenagers in high school, and a special education teacher, but I felt something was missing from my life. At first I thought I was burning out, and it scared me. I knew I needed something new and challenging, and I knew I needed more than my daily routine.

Bono: When I speak of "involvement with a vengeance," I am not exaggerating; I did it all. I earned a master's degree in biology, another in administration and supervision. I volunteered to teach courses other than general science, including Spanish, reading and math. I co-developed pilot programs: Mastery Learning, Future Studies, Latin Cornerstone Project, and my own curriculum in the teaching of Esperanto, the only course of its kind offered in New York City.

I accepted an assistant principalship in a local elementary school and saw beginning teachers in a new light, observing how the freshman courtesy concept had begun to wane. When my term expired, I transferred from my original school, an intermediate school, to an elementary school and then went on to a high school.

On all three levels, in all three schools, I never ceased getting involved. My general chemistry program became the forerunner for a new curriculum which I wrote. It will be piloted in New York State next year. My participation in school committees has led to a new ninth grade reorganization.

Krieg: I was a bit surprised to find out a few days later that not only was I chosen to be an advisor, but so was a mainstreamed science teacher. We would be co-advisors and, as luck would have it, the chemistry (no pun intended) was just perfect between us.

We did not know each other that first hour, but by the end of that first meeting we were like old friends. Through our involvement in the club, which became affectionately known as the "Teacher Wanna-Bees," a whole new world opened up for me.

For the first time, I was working with mainstream

teachers and honor students. I could walk into the teachers cafeteria or a school meeting and be welcomed at a table of "teachers," not just "special education teachers." We had something to discuss of mutual interest and importance.

From a simple after-school club that met twice a month, a program was created.

Bono: One of my proudest achievements has been my involvement in the Cadet Teacher Corps or "Teacher Wanna-Bees." Not only am I pleased with the growth and development of this program and the students in it, but I am pleased with the way the program's co-advisor, Eileen Krieg, and I have worked together.

Eileen was a beginning teacher; I was an 18-year veteran. I had been "brought up" with "freshman courtesy" ringing in my ears; Eileen had never heard of it, and would not have abided by it, even if she had.

This was a professional marriage of a novice and a veteran, one partner exhibiting an abundance of idealism, the other tempering, controlling and playing the role of the experienced, wise old man. Together we were like Batman and Robin, and the program grew to be very successful because nothing was done in haste (thanks to the old man) and nothing was put off until tomorrow (thanks to the neophyte).

Krieg: Because we got involved in school life, we not only created a club but we created a program that allowed us to apply for and win an IMPACT II grant. Other schools throughout the country have contacted us, requesting information so they can adapt our program. We do workshops, speak at principal and parent meetings and attend conventions.

Two virtual strangers, looking for something different, took an idea, gave birth to a program, nurtured it, and, like proud parents, are now watching it grow in leaps and bounds. We are encouraging high school senior honor students to consider teaching as a career, and we are showing them the good and the bad sides of teaching. We are making a contribution to the future, and we believe we are making a difference.

Schools are like families, some big and some small. Regardless of its size or wealth, the interaction among its members is a vital ingredient in a school's success and development. Getting involved is the key that opens or closes the door. This is not an 8-to-2, or 9-to-3, job. The door to this house is always open. Just turn the knob.

Bono: As beginning teachers, you have an option: get involved from the first day, or "hang out" for a year. You have read our views, and you must decide on your own course of action. Remember, however, as you ponder your choices, that both options are means to a common end: the betterment of education and the professional growth of the teacher.

Choose wisely, but get INVOLVED!

7 The Homestretch—March to June

Most teachers intend to evaluate their performance soon after the school year has ended and the last bell has rung. However, year-end exhaustion and the understandable need for a break from classroom work may cause teachers to put off this exercise in self-evaluation. Knowing this, many an experienced teacher will recommend that you assess the year's progress before you head down the homestretch.

The homestretch also requires some forethought, so that your lesson plans and activities will not conflict with the standardized tests students take in the spring, or with the rehearsals and preparations for sports events, graduation, class trips, school outings, or student publication (yearbook, newspaper, poetry book) deadlines. Knowing when tests and events are scheduled is an integral part of strategic planning and good classroom-management techniques.

Some time during spring vacation, take a look at the yearlong goals and objectives you set for your class in September or before the school year began. Don't worry if those objectives are not precisely on target, or if you overestimated where your students would be in different subject areas or in various textbooks or in specific skills attainment. It is far better to have aimed too high than to have expected too little. Remember your goals were ideal, and long-term plan estimates were made without ever having met your students or assessed their capabilities. This is the time when the ideals you set in the fall meet up with the reality you face in the spring. Now, with approximately a third of the school year left, you can make goal adjustments, revise objectives, and therefore "maximize" the effectiveness of the remaining teaching time.

Begin positively, with an informed professional assessment of all that your students have learned. Recall the overall progress that difficult learners, as well as those with average or exceptional ability, have made. Take pride in the knowledge that students are working together and individually better than when class began. Take credit for helping a student to overcome an emotional problem, family calamity, learning disability, or physical handicap that impeded the learning process. Think back on an exceptional activity or event that made "stars" of your students and garnered schoolwide, public or parental recognition: the class performance at a holiday assembly, the book sale to raise funds to support an important community project, the choral presentation at a senior citizen center, or the class publication of prose and poetry. All in all, you will probably feel pretty good about most of the year, and in what you and your students have accomplished to date. You will now be better able to think about what still needs to be done to bring the school year to a successful conclusion for all.

Standardized tests

Most standardized tests and school placement tests are given in the last quarter of the school year, in March or April. Prior to that time, make note of the type of testing format that will be used—such as essay, fill in the blank, or multiple choice. Obtain, if possible, a test given to your grade level the previous year. Look at the skills tested. Finally, analyze and ask yourself the following:

> **"A teacher affects eternity..."**
>
> **Henry Adams**

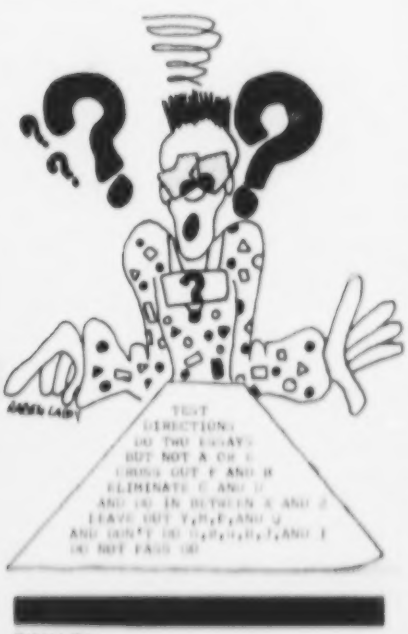
1. **How is the test administered to the students?**
   - if orally, you will need to reinforce listening skills
   - if silently, you will need to reinforce reading skills
2. **What is the test asking the student to do?**
3. **What kind of distractors are put in the test?**
4. **Most important, how closely does the test parallel the curriculum offered?**

When preparing for standardized tests, stress their importance and indicate how significantly the results will affect the students the following year. Keep this discussion to a level that the children can understand. You may want to design examples that show the format the test follows. Find materials that are similar to the standardized test format, such as some section tests in basal readers. "Practice makes perfect," and it also makes children feel more comfortable if they know what format to expect.

Designing tests

Designing a test can be quite creative and definitely requires thought to be effective. First, what are the objectives of the test: why are you testing? A good test is not only a diagnostic or an evaluative instrument but also a teaching device. A good test includes questions at various levels of the thinking scale. Bloom's *taxonomy* is widely used, but others are good, too. Students need the stimulation and challenge of processing information on all levels (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation). Teachers locked into asking questions on the bottom level, knowledge, do not provide the opportunity for their students to learn how to think on a higher level.

Be very careful about the directions on the test. Often teachers do not realize their directions are unclear or incomplete. Listen to the questions students ask when they get a test. The students' queries about procedure can give you clues about your directions. Also, walk around during the testing period to explain directions and to reinforce and encourage students. They will appreciate this, and scores will improve.


TEST
DIRECTIONS:
DO TWO ESSAYS
BUT NOT A OR C
CROSS OUT E AND B
ELIMINATE C AND D
AND 1&2 IN BETWEEN X AND Z
LEAVE OUT Y, W, E, AND Q
AND DON'T DO 1, 2, 3, AND 4
DO NOT PASS GO

Robert Lebov

Let students practice first when testing in a new format. Rob Schoenbaum

Remember that testing is not a "gotcha" proposition. An effective teacher acts as a coach, not an adversary, so tell the students what kind of test you are giving and what it will cover. Giving a practice test and going over the answers immediately is one good way to review.

Take into consideration the type of assignment you wish to evaluate. For example, if you are simply trying to decide whether your students read a story, only a few true-false or multiple choice questions may be required. On the other hand, if you are giving a test on a chapter or a skill, your questions should be of greater depth.

Testing students on material that has been covered is a critical part of teaching. Often, a series that you are using has its own tests and offers criteria for evaluation and norms to indicate success or failure of your students. You must also record carefully any indication of a student's day-to-day successes or failures. Children who are overachievers may test poorly, or children who do little day to day may test well. All things must be considered.

If you must design a test yourself, keep a few things in mind. It should cover only the material you have read or discussed with your class. It should be broad enough to show an understanding of general concepts. It should lend itself to fair grading.

Design your tests carefully and creatively. Take the exam yourself. How long did it take you to complete it? Did it test what you wanted it to test? Did it seem fair? Did you teach and review the work properly? Did you use variety—word problems, cartoons, maps, charts, graphs? Consider take-home tests and projects. Decide whether you would offer a substitute test or project for those who failed the original exam. Other evaluative techniques include art projects and posters, correspondence, book reports, research papers and projects, experiments, and interviews.

Test-taking strategies

Preparing students to take tests, teacher-made and standardized, is important. Taking tests is a study skill that children need to be efficient and effective as students. Many view studying for a test as a cram session the night before. This only puts the information into the short-term memory, unreliable at best under stress. Students must be taught that studying—reading, reciting, and reviewing—needs to be done on a regular basis in order to

move the information into the long-term memory. Recent research has shown that reciting aloud and reviewing routinely are significant factors in learning and recalling. Reciting aloud causes students to clarify their thoughts about a topic and to recognize what they do or do not understand and remember.

Other test-taking hints to give your students include these: arrive on time in order to relax (an aid to recall), and be alert. Slow, deep breathing helps. Look over the entire test before beginning; then allot time for each section according to difficulty and point value. Mark the test directions to ensure reading accuracy. Answer easy items first. Answer all questions, even if guessing is necessary, unless guessing is penalized. In multiple choice make certain all choices are read before deciding. In true-false, all of a statement must be true or else it is considered false. Do not refocus an essay question onto a different topic.

"Several days prior to the test, I hand out review sheets in outline form that highlight critical information, and read these with the students. I remind them to study every day and not wait until the last evening to prepare. I teach them to highlight with green, red or yellow pens, and to distill by creating review sheets on index cards, with one discreet piece of information per card. These, I joke, can be carried and studied everywhere—even the bathroom."

Evaluating your progress

- See if you stuck to your time line.
- Keep a folder of work for each child, with a checklist. (This will also assist you in making report card evaluations.)
- Review standardized test results.

The results of the above can be analyzed by you, your principal and resource people (i.e., reading specialists, guidance counselors). This will give you a broader perspective; it will usually parallel your professional judgment of the child's progress. The results of standardized tests and report card information are often kept in the child's permanent record and will help next year's teacher, who might even be you.

Once you are past the achievement testing period, ask your students for feedback. What parts of the test were easy? Hard? What did they not know that the teacher could have taught them? Was the preparation helpful or not? And, how do they think they did? Not only will this discussion give you some insights and suggestions to help you plan next year's preparation for test taking, but it gives the test takers a chance to blow off steam. If you postpone this discussion to wait for test results, the school year may have ended or the kids may have forgotten the affective as well as the cognitive experience of taking the test.

A final word on how to breeze through March to June

Although the calendar informs you that it is the first week of March, the sunshine flooding the room signals spring to the students.

Rob Schoenbaum

Students hone research skills when they prepare a homestretch trivia bowl.

"The Homestretch—March to June" can be dreaded days of heat, humidity, hyperactivity or sluggishness. In spite of all your attempts to engage your class in meaningful learning activities, you notice many of your students looking out of the window. Others who are looking straight at you are floundering about, unable to complete a single task. Rather than try to combat this onslaught of spring fever with heavy doses of winter routines, why not turn the homestretch into a culmination of the year's work by allowing the students to stretch their creative imaginations and display their newly acquired academic skills. Try tempering your students' spring fever with productive projects that will make the homestretch a pleasure to pull through. What follows here are a few projects that you may want to try.

If you managed to complete most of your curriculum objectives on paper, but wonder how much of the content your students have retained, involve your students in a "trivia bowl" to reinforce skills and review your curriculum content. First, form student committees around different subject areas—history, math, English. These groups will take on the responsibility of creating the questions. Provide textbooks, extracurricular content area materials, a relevant commercially designed trivia game, and reference books from the library that relate to the specific subject area of each committee. Allow the committees a week or two to devise at least 200 questions. Be sure that they also note the answers and the sources for these answers. Their involvement in a fairly extensive research project based on their readings will afford students experience in a key critical thinking exercise—question formulation. Review the sources and questions, discuss the rules, and schedule game time.

The trivia bowl project can be done with almost any middle to upper elementary group. It is also perfect for honing or maintaining subject literacy in almost any content area on the secondary level. As a secondary school teacher of social studies or history, you may want to introduce some of your students to Tom Burnam's *Dictionary of Misinformation* and the Wallaces' *Significa*. Several secondary-level teachers of various subjects could run a joint or grade bowl. An excellent source for students to use in developing questions for such a bowl is E.D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy—What Every American Needs to Know*. A series of monthly trivia bowls, with a culminating "world series bowl" held in June, will ease the tensions of the homestretch as the students stretch their subject literacy.

Another stretching project for students could be a June series of "student readings from favorite writers." Why not give your students a chance to select independently and share writings of authors they enjoyed reading during the year.

"This 'students' choice' or 'student readings from favorite writers' project was generated this past year by my seventh-grade students. They asked me if they could share some works they had read on their own. The students' oral presentations and introductions to these works, which ran the gamut from Spiderman through Lois Duncan and Judy Blume all the way to T.S. Eliot, were uniformly excellent. Their classmates echoed their enthusiasm by responding to the readings with a hearty round of applause. I sat back delighted as the students demonstrated how well they had learned to reverse roles. It was wonderful being on the receiving end of a communication arts and reading lesson for a change."

A final homestretch student project utilizes a mystery magazine format, and develops a "Mystery Night Whodunit" production. Right after the spring break, draft a committee of writers for this special project. These students will work together through late April and into early May on a script for Mystery Night. Once the basic script is completed, the student creators hold auditions for the roles. When the play is cast, an art committee of interested students is formed to design the backdrops. Members of the art committee often double as prop managers and lighting designers. Late May is absorbed by preparations and rehearsals for Mystery Night, which is held in early June. Just before the night itself, students go on the public address system to bombard their fellow students with their own "hard sell" commercials. The students canvas the neighborhood with their own posters. Mystery Night itself can be an evening event attended by the school as a whole, and the community at large. Although you and the students may be completely exhausted at its end, the students' growth as independent writers, thinkers, organizers, entrepreneurs, and communicators will be no "mystery." In addition, the monies raised by the program may be used to fund future special projects.

As long as the students are given a chance to stretch themselves under your supervision, you will be surprised and delighted by how quickly you breeze through the March-to-June homestretch. Indeed, whatever your students' learning pace or achievement during the school year, allowing them to pull themselves through the homestretch leaves them as winners, eager to get back on track for learning laurels in September.

Contributing Teachers

Name	School Name	IMPACT II Site
Audrey A. Adams	San Francisco Unified School District	San Francisco (CA)
Pearl Ann Allen	Intern Mentor Program	Washington, D.C.
Judith A. Ballantyne	Emerson Elementary School	LINK (Everett, WA)
Vincent Bono	New Dorp High School	New York City (NY)
Sharon Briggs	Lake Braddock Secondary School	Fairfax County (VA)
Rosemary Cabe	Lompoc Valley Middle School	Santa Barbara County (CA)
Patricia Ann Crowley	Redding Elementary School	San Francisco (CA)
Timothy Gangwer	Kolter Elementary School	Houston (TX)
David Georgi	Santa Maria High School	Santa Barbara County (CA)
Jean Gibran	Joseph J. Hurley School	Boston (MA)
Paula Hartman	Child Service Center	Portland (OR)
S.T. Hawk	Attucks Middle School	Houston (TX)
Woodie J. Ischer	W.T. Woodson High School	Fairfax County (VA)
Merleen D. Ivey	John Hopkins Avenue Elementary School	Mississippi Effective School Consortium (MS)
Judith Decherd Jones	Chapel Hill Senior High School	Chapel Hill (NC)
Rochelle Kaplan	Eastern District High School	New York City (NY)
Joyce M. Kent	San Marcos High School	Santa Barbara County (CA)
Eileen G. Krieg	New Dorp High School	New York City (NY)
Kerri Lyons	Kolter Elementary School	Houston (TX)
Lois Montgomery	Fairfax County Public Schools	Fairfax County (VA)
Betty Myers	Glenfeliz Boulevard Elementary School	Los Angeles (CA)
Sharon M. Pike	Floris Elementary School	Fairfax County (VA)
Fevrel W. Pratt	Portland Public Schools	Portland (OR)
Rose Reissman	Ditmas Junior High School 62	New York City (NY)
Michael Rutter	Valley Cottage School	Westchester Rockland (NY)
Robert Sarnoff	John Dewey High School	New York City (NY)
Barbara L. Schmidt	Dobbs Ferry Union Free School District	Westchester Rockland (NY)
Lucille Sheets	Jason Lee Elementary School	Portland (OR)
Marilyn Siegel	Public School 9M	New York City (NY)
Carol Simiele	Solvay Elementary School	Central New York Teacher Center (NY)
Christy M. Thomas	Rocky Run Intermediate School	Fairfax County (VA)
Yvonne Turung	T.H. Rogers School	Houston (TX)
Debby Darby Vandevender	Public School 59M	New York City (NY)
Nina Wasserman	Public School 131K	New York City (NY)
Judy Whatley	Carver Middle School	Mississippi Effective School Consortium (MS)
Deborah Witherell	Gifted And Talented Education Program	San Francisco (CA)
Tony Zaharias	Santa Barbara High School	Santa Barbara County (CA)
Judith P. Zinsser	United Nations International School	New York City (NY)

New Teachers Handbook Advisory Committee

Ernest Boyer
President, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

Stuart Buice
Women's City Club

Lodema Burrows
Dean of Academic Affairs, Bank Street College of Education

William J. Cirone
Superintendent, Office of the County Superintendent of Schools, Santa Barbara

Ramon C. Cortines
Superintendent, San Francisco Unified School District

William L. Dandridge
Executive Director, Massachusetts Field Center for Teaching and Learning

Mary Hatwood Futrell
President, National Education Association

Richard R. Johnson
Research Director, Exxon Education Foundation

John Poreba
Teacher, P.S. 97, Manhattan

John B. Poster
Chair, Department of Educational Administration, Pace University

Susan Shafer
Editor, Scholastic, Inc.

Albert Shanker
President, American Federation of Teachers

Robert R. Spillane
Superintendent, Fairfax County Public Schools (VA)

Dorothy Succoff
Teacher, Stuyvesant High School

For More IMPACT II Information

Boston Public Schools (MA)
Barbara Locurto
IMPACT II
26 Court Street
Boston, MA 02108

Cherry Creek Schools (CO)
Joan B. Grady
Cherry Creek Schools
4700 S. Yosemite Street
Englewood, CO 80111

Chicago Foundation for Education (IL)
Phyllis Chambers
Chicago Foundation for Education
135 South LaSalle Street–Suite 1744
Chicago, IL 60603

Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools (NC)
Hazel Gibbs
Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools
Lincoln Center, Merritt Mill Road
Chapel Hill, NC 27516

State of Colorado and Cheyenne, Wyoming
Carol Shearon
Public Service Company of Colorado
P.O. Box 840
Denver, CO 80201-0840

State of Connecticut
Marie Della Bella
Celebration of Excellence
205 Skiff Street
Hamden, CT 06157

Dade Public Education Fund (FL)
Lori Mohr
IMPACT II
Dade Public Education Fund
21 S.E. First Avenue–Suite 701
Miami, FL 33131

District of Columbia Public Schools (DC)
Gladys P. Morgan
Division of Curriculum and Instruction
Bunker Hill
14th Street & Michigan Ave. N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20017

Fairfax County Public Schools (VA)
Sylvia Auton
IMPACT II
Fairfax County Public Schools
7423 Camp Alger Avenue
Falls Church, VA 22042

Houston Independent School District (TX)
Susan Wethington
Professional Development
Houston Independent School District
3830 Richmond Avenue
Houston, TX 77027

Illinois Mathematics & Science Academy
Ann Hanson
Illinois Mathematics & Science Academy
1500 West Sullivan Road
Aurora, IL 60506-1049

Los Angeles Educational Partnership (CA)
Diane Glinos
Los Angeles Educational Partnership
315 West Ninth Street–Suite 1110
Los Angeles, CA 90015

Lowcountry Educators' Cooperative (SC)
Ann Birdseye
IMPACT II
Charleston County School District
Hutson and Meeting Streets
Charleston, SC 29403

State of Maine
Susan Hanley
Maine Center for Educational Services
225 Main Street
P.O. Box 620
Austin, ME 04212

State of New Jersey
Joyce Kersey
A+ FOR KIDS Teacher Network
50 Park Place–Suite 955
Newark, NJ 07102

New York City Public Schools (NY)
Margot Jones
IMPACT II
131 Livingston Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Ohio Department of Education
Paula Knight
IMPACT II
65 South Front Street–Rm 611
Columbus, OH 43266-0308

Portland Public Schools (OR)
Bruce Richards
Portland Public Schools
P.O. Box 3107
Portland, OR 97202

Sacramento County Office of Education (CA)
Joyce Wright
Sacramento County Office of Education
9738 Lincoln Village Drive
Sacramento, CA 95827

Salt Lake Education Foundation (UT)
Orville Carnahan
Salt Lake Education Foundation
440 East First South
Salt Lake City, UT 84111

San Diego County Office of Education (CA)
Mariam True
Professional Development Center
Southern Consortium
6401 Linda Vista Road–Rm 405
San Diego, CA 92111-7399

San Francisco Education Fund (CA)
Amy Barfield
San Francisco Education Fund
One Ecker Street–Suite 250
San Francisco, CA 94105

Santa Barbara County Office of Education (CA)
Nancy Emerson
IMPACT II
Santa Barbara County Schools
4400 Cathedral Oaks Road
Santa Barbara, CA 93160-6307

Westchester County/Rockland County (NY)
Elissa Spedafino and Diane Gess
IMPACT II
SW BOCES
2 Westchester Plaza
Elmsford, NY 10523

Western Maine (ME)
Margaret Arbuckle
Professional Development Center
University of Maine at Farmington
104 Main Street
Farmington, ME 04938

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